THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

BY

JAMES H. COUSINS

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THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

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Presented by:-
Shri M. R. Vakil
Date 18.5.71

BY
JAMES H. COUSINS

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This book is not about the Indian Renaissance, but about the Renaissance in India, a small difference in words but a large one in substance. It is not retrospective and finished, but contemporary and therefore happily incomplete. It is limited to literature and painting: but drama, music, sculpture, architecture and handicrafts are feeling the new life. Their omission is due to the fact that the author is a human being working in time and space: also to a feeling that at the present juncture anything that can add to the understanding of India by herself should not wait for full speech. I hope that the comparative references to East and West will not be taken as an effort to deal in a balanced way with the subjects concerned. Life leaves perfect balance to science laboratories and (sometimes) shop counters, and proceeds on its way to wisdom through zig-zags of prejudice. And so, against the whole weight of a religious and social upbringing that consigned everyone outside my own faith to Hell, and took Europe (before August 1914) to be the first and last word in culture, I have tried to take on an intelligent, not a blind, eastern prejudice, so that thereby I might attain, and perhaps communicate, a larger and deeper comprehension of the spiritual, mental and emotional forces that are moulding the India of the near future.

JUNE, 1918.
WOOD COLLEGE,
MADANAPALLE,
SOUTH INDIA.

J. H. C.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

CONTENTS

	Page
The Renaissance in India ...	3
The Arts in Nation-Building ...	23
Some Indian Art-Origins ...	43
The Bengal Painters : First Impressions—1916 ...	61
The Bengal Painters : Second Impressions—1918 ...	89
Ruskin, The Indian Race and Indian Art	115
Literary Ideals	151
Philosophy and Poetry ...	183
Religion and the Renaissance ...	221
The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu ...	249
The Orientation of Western Literature	281

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

DEDICATED

TO

SIR JOHN WOODROFFE

LADY WOODROFFE

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

GOGONENDRANATH TAGORE

ORDHENDRA COOMAR GANGOOLY

AND

N. BLOUNT

THROUGH WHOM I

FOUND THE WAY

TOWARDS THE SECRET

OF INDIA.

J. H. C.

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THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

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THE RENAISSANCE IN INDIA

SOME people regard the recurrence of a thing as a proof of its existence. I am by temperament inclined to suspect a thing on its second appearance, and on its third appearance to show it the door. I get an uneasy feeling that it is not a real, tangible thing, but a projection of some notion of my own into space; and the end of a long think on the subject is a suspicion that our talk of evolution is folly; that we are let down on an invisible string into the World of Everything and told by our Parents to play; whereupon, instead of enjoying ourselves, we begin to take things seriously: we make selections from Everything, call them Something, put our mark of ownership upon them, and get annoyed when somebody else's Something collides with ours, and both crumble back to Everythingness.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Therefore I have suspected the Renaissance in India. That is probably why I have written this book about it, for is it not, indeed, the uncertainties and the incomplete things that lure us into the passionate protest that is the inspiration of literature, and the compassionate solace that is the condition of its enjoyment? In face of the certain and the complete, is there not room only for silence, silence which is not the absence of sound, but its fulfilment?

I have suspected the Indian Renaissance because it is the fourth or fifth of the species that I have come across; and I have wondered if, after all, I have only brought with me a renaissance-habit that would find signs of birth in a graveyard.

In my early youth I began the practice of being in at the birth of various revivals; and I thought I had reached the climax when I gave my share to the Celtic Renaissance, and, after dreaming high dreams for sixteen years, wept to see the art we gave our hearts to make noble and true, dragged on an English music-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

hall stage to a depth lower than that of the red-nosed comedian. Then I came to India. I had a hope that here I should find an atmosphere consistent with the dignity of middle life and its symbols, and space and quiet in which one might hope to gather some reapings from the ploughings and the sowings of the spring. I had figured to myself the literary and the artistic tradition of India as something settled and mellow that one could live with in ease and confidence as with a wise and gentle friend. I had thought of her philosophical certainties as of a house of rock in which the fuss and speculation of the West would find understanding and repose.....Instead, I came upon the spirit of the Child Krishna, and the energy of the Dancing Siva, and in less than six months I was up to the eyes in signs and tokens of a new life in literature, the arts, religion and national aspiration, movements that throw me back a quarter of a century in spirit, and leave me with the merest spectacular interest in grey hairs, and no shadow of the sentiment and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

superiority that are the rewards of middle age. In spite of my suspicion, I have to accept the Renaissance in India. I have to declare that India is awake.

It is, I believe, the correct thing to speak of "The Indian Awakening." Yet, my deepest sensation has been as if *I* had been awakening, not India. The truth is, India needs no awakening. She is wide awake. She has always been wide awake. She never was more wide awake than when she, with three hundred million souls in her keeping, graciously permitted a handful of my race to turn their foreheads as wrinkled as the stem of a palmyra by shouldering "the white man's burden," while she goes peacefully on, repeating history by taking her captor captive by the infusion of the magic of an ancient culture in such utterances of a supreme spirituality as come through so perfect an instrument as Rabindranath Tagore.

Of course my fellow-westerners do not recognize the insidious process. They are simply enjoying a new literary sensation, as they think. To admit the reception

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

of culture from a heathen country would be absurd!

I read sometime ago an article by Sir Frederick Kenyon, an eminent English scholar, on "Ideals of English Culture," in which he was good enough to say that England did not condemn or ignore the contributions made by certain nations to culture. Indian culture did not appear in the list of contributory nations.

I should not like to be unjust to a scholar of the attainments of Sir Frederick Kenyon, but I have a suspicion that, if not to him, certainly to others, Indian culture is not eligible for a place among cultural dissertations because it lacks the one qualification—deadness. Indian culture is as alive to-day as it was millennia ago: and a live culture, especially if it be falsely regarded as a rival culture to that of its overlordship, and a "heathen" one to boot, is not likely to be regarded as sufficiently harmless to become a subject for quotation.

I believe that the reason for this attitude, which is no product of imagination but a

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

fact, is contained, though quite unconsciously, in Sir Frederick Kenyon's diagnosis of the English taste for *truth*: "Our love for truth," he says, "is for practical truth, for a truth that will work, not for speculative or abstract truth." This is the old utilitarianism in full cry. It has no use for truth unless it can be made amenable to the desires of humanity. It is the spirit that, on the outbreak of the war, renounced the Sermon on the Mount as a truth that *would not work*.

This attitude is, of course, rank materialism. It denies the validity of truth for its own sake. It makes truth an entirely territorial and racial affair, and it is the root of the anthropomorphic habit that is the dry-rot of Christian thought and experience. Quite naturally it cannot regard a presentation of truth in another land and through other instruments of revelation, together with its resultant culture, as other than outside its own circumference.

The effect of this exclusion has been disastrous. The reverse process—that is,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the small and recent impact of eastern thought on the West, has been wholly for good, for it has tended to lift the ideal of truth towards the abstract and speculative. Further, it has made a little rift in the racial lute that by and by will make the music of intolerance mute; but, meanwhile, it has to meet the opposition of the old spirit of racial ascendancy which can only exist on the illusion of the exclusive possession of a universal truth.

What struck me, however, as the most curious feature in Sir Frederick Kenyon's article was the setting of England's culture against its strongly rooted materialism, as if the one was native, and the other a foreign intruder, when the plain fact is that English materialism is the natural product of a culture that renounces the spiritual uplift of the abstract and the speculative (such as permeates and vivifies Indian culture), and sets its standard no higher than the low region called the practical.

When anyone speaks in the West of the awakening of India, I think what is

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

really meant is that India shows signs of using the tools and weapons of her masters. She has adopted just as much of western method as will serve the purpose of gaining the attention of the West; and as the West becomes more and more conscious of the East, it blandly concludes that the East is awakening, when the truth is that the East, at any rate India, has sat up all night, and is entering upon the exhilarating task of awakening the West. India of to-day is the India of the centuries. She has never moved far from herself. Her past is not a mere source of archæological pride to her present: her past *is* her present. The *Mahabharata* is not a shelved classic. It is a dynamic force. Shiva and Vishnu are not mummies of a worm-eaten mythology; they are living powers that go into the business of life on the foreheads of their millions and millions of devotees.

This does not mean that India has stood still, while Europe has gone on towards some bright goal and stumbled by accident upon Armageddon. India,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

too, has moved; but while Europe has moved away from her history, India has carried her history with her, not in books, but in her thought and her blood.

It is this weight of antique modernity that is the secret of India's recuperative and assimilative power; it is this also that makes forever impossible the only possible condition that could rob her of all the constituents of national life, save the legislative—the total destruction of her distinctive literature and art. Whatever impact the West may make upon the East, there is nothing more certain than that those impacts will sooner or later find themselves oriented.

I suppose umbrellas, as a species, came into existence in the tropics, where sun and rain make a covering necessary; but the modern black alpaca, steel-ribbed affair, with its halo of urban respectability on a pound a week, is here quite another thing. I write this particular chapter within earshot of trowel and hammer and the din of Tamil voices on a rising building. The monsoon has burst in a deluge that

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

rusts your razor blades packed in grease-proof paper inside their tin box and case in a drawer. Yet I hear no cessation of the work of the Indian builders and their women "hodsmen." I look out, and there I see the bricklayers and mortar-mixers working away with black umbrellas held over their heads by other workers, a thing beyond the dignity of a "British workman"—a thing that here not merely orientalises Brixton's covering, but makes the orient still more oriental.

My present view of the orient is from Madras. From here to the northern extremity of the geographical unit called India, is roughly two thousand miles. At the present moment I am able to distinguish between groups speaking Telugu and Tamil, each of which languages has about twenty millions of speakers with an ancient literature and a modern intellectual movement. Downstairs several printers are talking Canarese, the language of Mysore State. A Malayali is reading an article in a magazine on the Malayalam drama. A group of Muham-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

madans in the street are talking Urdu. Three Mahrattas from the north will go home with me in the motor. On the way in we picked up a Gujerati. One of the Mahrattas, seeing an Indian woman trying painfully to get into English shoes, in a missionary region, spoke a line in Sanskrit to the effect, "The king makes time," that is, he sets the fashion, the king in this case being the ruling class, and the fashion shoes. With such diversity of language, race and tradition, it might appear at first-sight rather moonshiny to talk of India as of a single entity that is rising from sleep. I can only speak for what the eye sees along a thousand mile line over which I have travelled. I travelled along a similar line in Europe, and found all sorts of grouped divergencies from the west Irishman, the black country Englishman, the French villager, the Dutch milkwoman, to the stolid north German; but all along and at the end of the thousand miles from here to Calcutta it is always India.

India is, in fact, one country, and the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

unifying factor is her religious literature. One has heard stories of thousands of gods and hundreds of religions ; but living contact reduces the Deities and systems to variants of a simple central thesis. One soon finds that a score of "goddesses" are facets of one Shakti. Behind the creeds and ceremonials stand the Gita, the Upanishads, the Tantra, the Vedas ; yet these, though referable to receding ages as regards their rise, are living influences to-day.

I stood one night outside the sculptured gateway of a village temple of Shiva, and watched the devotees, among the glare and smoke of torches, and the din and squeal of drums and oboes, dance the God on his car. A supple ascetic young man in clean white garments, showing across his naked shoulder the triple cord of the Brahman, came over to me with a salutation. I spoke of the gate sculptures, of Subramaniya, the son of Shiva and Parvati, of Kartikeya, who leads the host of heaven, on his peacock, and tentatively went slightly below the surface. In ten

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

minutes we had passed into the God-less region of pure abstraction, and touched the essential element that is the veritable life of all religions. When the procession of the God passed out of the temple on its journey around the tank under the tall lithe palms that fanned the cheek of the full-faced moon, I knew I had found some deep correlation between the trumpery village ceremonial and the Cosmic order, and caught something of the secret of India.

At another time in an inland city, where all the Gods do homage to a Goddess, and the most famous exponent of Indian spiritual monism had his home, I gazed somewhat pathetically on a gew-gaw temple accessory made of the cheapest and nastiest material, and painted in sickening colours; yet in the mantapam, or rest-house, among sculptures of great age and power, I halted to listen to two men who chanted from the Vedas alternate verses, and gave out wisdom that is as new as to-day, yet is wrought into Plato and Christianity.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

So past and present, inner and outer, go side by side: and one needs but the focus of sympathy, and a very little understanding of the true nature of humanity, to blend these divergencies. To some they are mere barbarism; but I have observed that those who pour contempt on Ganesha, with his six arms, have no scruples in their worship of a God in three persons; and I noted in my voyage out that well-meaning missionary ladies who resented the "triviality and superstition of heathen worship," would not dare to appear at Divine Worship in the ship's music-room without a hat or bonnet, because Saint Paul wrote something about women not appearing in church uncovered "because of the angels" —an item of ancient symbolism whose deep spiritual meaning is something more worthy of grown human beings than a question of millinery.

This unifying religious element has shown itself in the continuous history of the Indian *people*, rising on the basis of village life, and moving with practically

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

no interruption away from the fluctuations of fortune of the Kshattriya, or warrior caste, which monopolised the fighting, and was no greater charge on the resources of the people than any civil government of to-day on its constituents.

Politically also India achieved approximate unity. Before the coming of the English, she had experienced at least three centripetal movements that, in their vastness, and in their ethical and material richness, make the boasted movements of European progress appear of secondary magnitude.

The Roman Empire would have fitted into one of the corners of the great kingdom whose foundations were laid by Chandragupta in the fourth century B.C., whose bounds were carried by the immortal Ashoka from the Hindukush Mountains to Madras, an area covering the north to south extent of Europe; and the very rocks of Ashoka's kingdom teach a tolerance and a humaneness that are as yet only partially accomplished in lands that claim the monopoly of civilization.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

In the middle of the third century A.D. another Chandragupta arose, and gave his name to an era in Indian art. His son reigned for half a century, and established an empire that embraced the Gangetic plain and spread over the wider half of the peninsula. Its break-up was due to the same cause as precipitated the European Dark Ages—the coming of the Huns. That onslaught was ultimately broken by the Turks. Before the dislocated elements of the great Indian Empire could be readjusted, the brothers in faith and arms of the victorious Turks had arrived in India: the Muslim era set in at the opening of the eighth century.

Yet, though the Moghul Empire was the antithesis of the Hindu people in religious outlook and racial temperament, it succeeded by the time of Akbar, in the sixteenth century, in welding Hindu and Mussulman. Akbar's aim was a united India, and he re-established the vast empire of the first Chandragupta.

These three immense unifying political movements, apart from the rise of the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

great Maratha power in the seventeenth century, provide a greater quantitative and homogeneous justification for an entity called India than could be shown for any other entity that has achieved the status of nationality. Even had these great military and social unifications not come about, the fact remains that India has remained India, knit into invisible unity by the spiritual imagination that set its centres of reverence all over the peninsula, and wove between them an amazing net-work of saintly tradition, of poetical aspiration, of artistic achievement, of ethical wisdom, of interior illumination. This has become the common property of the India that is now finding voice to claim the duties and privileges of an adult and responsible member of the Community of Nations, and that in literature and the arts is providing a new instrument for the renascent power that moves from race to race and country to country seeking ever wider and deeper expression.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE
ARTS IN NATION-BUILDING

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE
ARTS IN NATION-BUILDING

It will help us to an intelligent appreciation of the present Renaissance in India if we first consider the place of the arts in nation-building. I am not, of course, thinking of the application of architectural or sculptural technique to the building of Delhi, or of any such merely practical application, save in so far as it is the inevitable outcome of the principles which I shall endeavour to bring out. I am thinking of a much more remote, yet much more intimate thing: the invisible, incorporeal, vast being that we call a nation, that may, as in Northern Europe, hide itself within walls for more than three quarters of the year, or may, as here in India, dwell largely under the open sky in the "house not made with hands".

In the looseness of daily speech we speak interchangeably of a country and a

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

nation. We regard the country as a unit peopled by diverse racial fractions: we regard the nation as a unit of association located on a more or less defined area of the earth's surface. In India the simple definitions of a nation as "people of a common stock," or "living in a common home," have to be confined and expanded to cover the greatest variety of peoples on one area of the surface of the globe, the area itself presenting every conceivable natural variation.

Yet, the India of the Indians is no more the real India than a house is its occupants; and the Indians of India are not to be put wholly in a census return. When you have put the Indian nation into a string of figures, you are eternities away from the real nation, unless you have reckoned up the *contents* of the counted heads. The real India hovers over India's heads: it is the totality of all that lives in the region of the imagination. It lives through Indian minds and bodies on Indian soil, but it is greater far than they: it includes them, as the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

soul includes the senses: but it is not included in any or all of them, as the soul cannot be included in any or all of the senses.

It would thus appear that, while a nation will include all the units within its scope, not all the units are equal sharers and expressors of the real national life. The masses of people who are compelled to live under a constant strain of labour, turned almost solely to the finding of food and clothing and housing, are far removed from the real Country of the Imagination; and it is because of this removal from the inspiration of the hidden Country of the Heart, that great masses within nations can be moved to join in acts that are in direct contradiction to the true spirit of the nation. And their direction is determined by small groups within the nation whose thoughts are not directed towards the ideal nation, but towards themselves, the groups that usually speak largely of cosmopolitanism, and have much to say of the narrowness of nationality.

I do not deny cosmopolitanism, but

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

it is a stage of human evolution remote from superficial chatter. It resides in the deepest region of the mind behind all minds: it is the *antahkarana*, the coheror of the vast sense-system of the world whose instruments are the nations; but it is not any one or all of its instruments. To tell India to be cosmopolitan is to tell your hand to overleap the narrowness of handiness and try to think thoughts or run a race, like brain or foot.

The true habitat of a nation is in the national imagination, and its true expression must be found in the national arts, those expressions of the individual imagination that spring from the same hidden realm into the social and natural environment of the counted heads and the mapped area. It is in the artistic records of a nation, much more than in the records of wars and dynastic changes, that the nation's true history is to be found. "History," as it is at present conceived, is the account of a nation's diseases, and much thought on disease is not the way to health : the story of India's real life is

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the story of the making of the Ramayana, the decorating of Ajanta, the sculpturing of Konarak, the revival of Indian painting in Bengal, the revival of Indian drama in the Telugu country, the All-India Musical Conference, the poetry and prose of Tagore ; and these are the more truly vocal of the inner soul of the country because they spring directly from the great affirmations of its spiritual consciousness : they are suffused as naturally with religion as they are with the food and drink and air that are wrought through the instruments of the artist into language and sound and colour.

Yet while this is true, and while the universality and antiquity of art-expressions bear testimony to their place as vital and essential parts of a nation's life, it is equally true that at present, the world over, there is an acute estrangement between the arts and life, between the principles that operate in the world of the imagination, and the principles that control the world of social organisation and personal conduct. The masses

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

of the people are as far removed from the inspiration of the arts as they are from the inspiration of nationality, and here also, as in the stress of circumstances which I have already referred to, lack the protection of awakened consciousness, and are liable to be betrayed into tastes that are as far removed from the truly artistic and national as the corpulent and gaudy figures of the Ravi Varma school are from the tense and austerely beautiful figures on a Conjiveram *mantapam* or a *ratha* at Mahabalipuram.

The cause of this estrangement between a nation's units and its arts is not far to seek. It is the natural result of a partially developed social system that condemns the great majority of the populations of all countries to a continuous grind of labour in order to find sustenance for the needs of the physical body of themselves and the rest of the community. Their enforced concentration on the lowest things of life shuts out from them the joy and uplift of open-eyed participation in the beauty and vision of the Divine Artist

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

that are seeking a response from the many-stringed *sitar* of the world. This is, of course, a very grievous deprivation. You cannot cut a people off from the art-expression which comes nearest to its own essential nature without loss to both the people and the art-expression. A nation without art is blind and dumb. An art without nationality only awaits its transport to the burning ghat; and so, in any consideration of the arts as applied to national life, it is necessary to be clear that the arts that are sought to be applied in nation-building are themselves national, national in expressing the national environment, the national temperament and the national direction.

The first of these three elements of a test of nationality in the arts (national environment) is so obvious that it is hardly necessary to do more than refer to it. The appearance of a skylark in a Cochin poem would be as false as the likening of his lady's eyes to a champak flower would be in the poetry of a West of Ireland bard of the twelfth century.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

There is, however, one curious feature which indicates that not all the details of a nation's environment may fit squarely into its arts. During recent exhibitions of the modern Indian painters, complaint was made that they stayed too much indoors, and confined themselves too exclusively to low tones. The assumption on which the criticism is based is that India, having "a place in the sun," should be sunlit and *al fresco* in its painting. The fact is that Indian painting seeks the complement of its tropical sunlight, namely, shadow, just as English painting, with its predilection for landscape and seascape, seeks in light and air the complement of its preponderating gloom and indoor life. A South Indian artist an hour before sunset would be under as great heat as a western artist on an August midday, and it is a rudiment of technique that high sunlight kills colour—though moderate sunlight vivifies it. The short and amazingly beautiful Indian dawns and dusks are all that nature condescends to bring within the limits of human en-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

durance. In this respect, therefore, the main feature of the daily national environment is reversed in the art of painting.

The second element in our test of nationality in the arts is national temperament. In the West there is a certain lawlessness attached to the idea of temperament: it is looked upon as a freak; and neither the upholders of strict canons of virtue—who are usually labelled philistine by the artists—nor the apologists for certain vicious indulgence, which is conceived to be a necessary condition of artistic expression, have any surer basis than a sentimental predilection for their use of the term. Here in India it is quite otherwise. The universal recognition of an accumulation of experience through many lives, translated into the essential characteristic, the temperament of the present life, sets up a standard of values, and makes a background of intellectual assumptions, whose influence even the most sympathetic and free-minded westerner can only vaguely glimpse. It shifts the emphasis from the immediate act and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the present life; and this removal is reflected in the arts of India in a quiet ignoring of the emotional and muscular side of things, and a natural drawing to the things of the inner life. Indian art does not say that God may not be found in the thunder; but it is certain that He is most intimately heard in the still, small voice. That is why the Indian arts, like Indian religion, are keyed to the single individual. The Indian temples are not—with slight exception—places for big, heedless crowds to meet in, and part, and forget, but for single individuals to face Deity in, and remember. Indian music is a thing of one string and one idea; and the new Indian painting shows a firm grasp of the central feature of Indian temperament by leaving big canvases and staring crowds to Burlington House, and keeping to small and low-toned epitomes of spiritual emotion and craft-love for the delectation of single devotees. The crowd may experience the thrill of a temporary emotional homogeneity; but there is always the danger that what

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

is everybody's partial concern at one moment may be nobody's particular concern at a later moment, whereas that which is vividly the concern of each is more than likely to become the associated concern of all. At any rate it works out so in India, for the India of individualism in religion and the arts is the India of unified collectivism—despite the anomalies of the modern degradation of the caste system, and the reprehensible social customs relating to women that arose through an ancient necessity and fell into a habit that has no authority in the Indian scriptures. India is everywhere typical of—India: some vast assimilative process, akin to the process at the other end of the Aryan chain, of making the invader "more Irish than the Irish themselves," seems to be working towards the finding of the simple primary *national direction*, of which the apparent divergences of national temperament are expressions.

This national direction, which is the third element in the test of nationality in the arts, may be summed up in the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

word *evocation*. The tendency of Indian religion, so far as I have been able to see it in its teachings and its practices, is to withdraw the consciousness from external operations, and to evoke some manifestation of the hidden side of the nature. The tendency of Indian music and art is the same. When, therefore, I find in poetry written in English by Indians, some expression of atheism or some straining after sensual pleasure, I feel an insincerity that can have no place in an art devoted to Indian nation-building. I do not, of course, mean to draw a narrow circle around poetry. I believe, on the contrary, that a full and healthy literature is unattainable without the spur and irritant of "honestdoubt," or even rampant unbelief. But the honest doubt must carry its credentials all over it by being indubitably Indian in imagery and idiom, and not merely a versification of Haeckel or Comte; and the lure of sense must, I hold, be sung less solidly and lusciously than Dante Gabriel Rossetti sang it. Even then, something of the Godward and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

inward direction of the national genius will hardly fail to slip out between the words.

I have called the Indian national direction *evocative* in contra-distinction to the *invocative* direction of European genius. Notwithstanding racial and linguistic differences, the development and interchange of the arts in the West has either led to, or become the articulation of, a general tendency of an expansive nature; not a tendency to slip through the consciousness into an enfolding Divinity, but to hold on to the consciousness, to exalt it by way of the emotions, and to invoke, so to speak, external powers after the manner of the early theurgists.

It is this tendency which shows itself in great churches, with elaborate ritual or enthusiastic music as the oblation and the means for creating an atmosphere for the manifestation of forces beyond the individuals; in music, with its passion and elaborate spreading of nets to catch the feet of angels—or devils as in the lascivious suggestiveness of the music of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

certain musical comedies; in painting, with its struggle to produce self-complete images of natural or human life or of a very definite and concrete fancy. In all this, there is the tendency to objectivity. Its counterpart is the subjective tendency of the Indian genius, which simplifies religious ceremonial, confines music to the barest melody, pays no homage to realistic anatomy in painting, and sets up a centripetal motion towards the centre of one's being, rather than towards its circumference.

These tendencies appear to be in opposite directions; but the orbital movement of the universe conditions all within it, and East carried far enough finds West waiting for it, as West likewise finds East. On the surface, however, at any given point, the illusory direction of tendency may set up an equally illusory barrier to appreciation, and result in merely academic discussion. The link will be found in the work of applying the arts to national life: the common and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

essential element will appear in the fundamental solvent of humanity.

The application of the arts to national life to which I refer is the simple one of stimulating in human beings the innate and growing love of beauty and its expression in the art-form that comes natural to the temperament of the individual. Such a love is bound to become one of the most powerful forces in human evolution. I was once looking over a school, in one of the industrial counties of England, in which a wise man was training his pupils of both sexes in love for natural beauty and in ability to translate and hold it. I asked him quizzically: "But what *practical* good will all this flower-planting and painting do for boys and girls who must shortly enter the factories and workshops to earn their living?" He scrutinised me quickly, caught my drift, and answered: "Yes, I am educating rebels, not slaves." His pupils can never acquiesce in their appallingly inartistic surroundings. Some evidence was seen of an attempt

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

to beautify their sordid homes; the same effort will go into the work-a-day life and set up a ferment.

But besides this general result on taste there will inevitably be given a stimulus to artistic *faculty* that will demand opportunity and facility for expression. The bit of the Divine Artist that is working in the back of every human brain will, sooner or later, cry out in the words of the present English Laureate,

> I too will something make,
> And joy in the making.

Creation will out. The artists are no mere dabblers in intellectual or emotional luxury, even though they themselves may have no higher idea of their work: they are God's eyes and mouths and fingers working among the strings and pigments of his vast studio of the Cosmos. Rabindranath had his *vina* attuned to truth, as well as beauty, when he sang.

> My poet, is it thy desire to see thy creation through my eyes, and to stand at the portal of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony?

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

To-day the artists are a small minority, and largely under the disability of economic necessity; but a day will come when the artist *in potentia* will demand the readjustment of the details of life to fuller expression. Already the demand is being foreshadowed in schemes for improving cities, in new methods of education, and the like. These will do to go on with, but they are child's play compared with the revolution which must come in order to fulfil the artist's need for repose, leisure and freedom. The fever of activity on the surface of life must lie down: the storm of sense must fade off the face of the waters so that the treasures of the deep may be sighted by the many, as they are now brokenly glimpsed by the few. The demands of usage must be taken off the shoulders of the day and week, so that the sensitive instrument of the inner Artist may have the time for the necessary adjustments and labour that precede and accompany the revelation of his vision. The compulsion of any authority save that of the inner Light

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

must be removed, so that genius may procure the same possibility for fruition as the flower whose revelation was so complete because, according to Wordsworth, it was "free down to its roots," as the artist must be in himself and in the body politic.

Any artistic conception of nation-building demands the recognition of these conditions: the artists themselves will in the future see to their fulfilment; and they will succeed, for they have behind and in them the urge of creation from the Mind of the Master-Artist, and its end no power can frustrate.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

SOME INDIAN ART-ORIGINS

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

SOME INDIAN ART-ORIGINS

THE mentioning of ancient times in connection with any of the arts in India does not carry with it the same distance or quantity as in the West. Agastya, the first Aryan missionary from the north of India to the Dravidian races of the south, in the eighth century B.C., is reputed to have systematised the art of image-making in bronze; but the intervening period of two thousand five hundred years is not so tremendous as it sounds. The rules laid down by Agastya are not mere matters of archæological interest: they are in use at the present day, as integral and identifiable as the Archimedean screw of the third century B.C. that at the present day lifts grain from floor to floor in an English mill.

This use of Agastya's rules in present day Indian image-making does not mean that the art is two millenia and a half behind the times. It means that Agastya is as up-to-date as the aphorisms of the ancient Chinese philosopher, Laotze,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

which have all the air of being spoken by a smart modern critic. Agastya struck the fundamentals of craft-beauty, as the Vedas struck the fundamentals of spiritual beauty—and fundamentals remain fundamental, inescapable, eternally modern. We may, if we have a mind to, concern ourselves with the intervening ramifications along the surface of life; but whereas, in western arts, an intelligent grasp of the artistic significance of a particular work is not possible without extensive knowledge of art-history, in India the historical element is only minutely obligatory. It is not necessary to survey the pageant of history sideways as it marches along, but to look at it end-on, as one looks at a tunnel the remote end of which is a spot of light in the centre of the field of vision. The art of the latest artificer in bronze has telescoped within it the art of Jaya, Parajaya and Bijaya of the eleventh century A.D., of Nagnajit of the fifth century (who was held also as an authority on painting), as well as the art of Agastya.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

To put the matter another way; an appreciation of any Indian form of art depends not so much on one's knowledge of Indian art-history as upon one's ability to clear the mind of historical *debris*, especially that of another race; the ability to get in front of the picture or image, rather than behind or beside it, and to catch the simple spiritual quality, the *What?* rather than the attenuated *How?* in either its technical or historical sense. Such an attitude is obviously open to the charge of shirking the matter of workmanship and of taste acquired through precedents, but it is really simply another way of enunciating the basic fact of Indian art: that its inspiration is supremely religious, and that where that inspiration has failed, technique has failed also. Historically (as Mr. O.C. Gangooly shows in his fine pioneer work on "South Indian Bronzes,") it is impossible to insert the blade of a knife between religious revival and artistic revival in India. The craft faculty, truly, has always had its exponents, but it was the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

zeal of religion that carried it to its highest achievements in such eras as that of the Chola dynasty in South India, and its immediate successors, from the tenth to the thirteenth century A.D.

Nothing remains to attest the skill of the earliest artificers who worked in accordance with the rules of Agastya, and of his successor, Kasyapat, whose stanzas are memorised even to-day for their rules of measurement and construction. The personages belong to the mythic stage of Indian evolution. The facts connected with them are not amenable to scientific tests; but it appears fairly certain that, whatever the ancient Agastya did as regards the bronze art, it was only one section of a great cultural transformation from the north which fulfilled itself through the agency of the indigenous language, Tamil, a grammar of which is credited to Agastya.

The earliest example of South Indian bronze work which Mr.Gangooly has found hails from Java, to which place Hindu culture had been conveyed, it is said, in

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the first century A.D., certainly before the Buddhist colonisation of the island in the fifth century. The example serves to prove the existence of artistic faculty of a very high order, but gives no idea as to how far the organisation of the image-makers had then developed; nor is it clear, in the present stage of research into the origins of Indian bronze art, how far their organisation had proceeded in the great Hindu revival from the fifth to the eighth centuries.

That revival, however, of the Brahmanism that Agastya had brought from the north thirteen centuries previously, was marked by a great outburst of craft production, (a rehearsal, so to speak, for the supreme afflatus of five centuries later.) It united the Saivaite worship (which Agastya, like Saint Patrick in Ireland, imposed on the earlier Dravidian culture by a tactful process of absorption, or as Cæsar merged the deities of the conquered Gauls in the Roman Pantheon) with the Vaishnavite worship, against the faiths of Buddhism and Jainism that prevailed

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

in South India in the fifth century A.D. The Saivite kings of the Chola dynasty, (who immortalised the temple city of Madura,) vied with the Vaishnavite kings of the Pallava dynasty (who immortalised themselves in the temple city of Conjiveram, and excavated the wonderful and beautiful rock temples of Mahavalipuram, the Seven Pagodas, Southey's City of Beli in "The Curse of Kehama") in endowing shrines to both Siva and Vishnu, and so stimulated activity among the bronze-workers in the making of ceremonial images.

This religious revival, that coincided with the beginning of Europe's Dark Age, was marked also by an outburst of literature, the expression of saints in poetry—Manikkavasagar in the sixth century who, from his energetic attacks on the rivals of Hinduism, was called "The Hammer of the Buddhists"; Sambandha and Appar in the seventh century; Sundara in the eighth. From these poet-saints, whose verses are living forces to-day, modern Saivism took its rise, and it is a

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

notable point as regards the origins of South Indian literature that the temples held specially sacred are those sung in their verses.

We have seen that this fifth to eighth century revival of religion and crafts was characterised by mutual tolerance between the Saivite and Vaishnavite sects of Hinduism in face of common rivals. A change came about in the tenth century. The Chola dynasty had secured ascendancy, and in its lavish patronage of the worship of Siva as against Jainism, led to an intense sectarian revival. This revival was accompanied by an equally intense artistic revival, for which the previous revival was, as we have observed, only a rehearsal. The new revival stamped itself predominantly and ineradicably on the temple arts of South India. Architecture, mural sculpture, ceremonial image-making, car decoration, flourished as never before. Every battle won by the Chola kings, every territorial increase, meant new temples, new images in the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

temple corridors, new figured lamps, new demands on the artists who, in their now fully organised schools, attained the highest degree of efficiency. Like the western guilds, they worked in groups : many entire villages in the district of Tanjore were populated by them.

The Chola power declined in the early twelfth century. The revival which it had brought about was followed, as it had been preceded, by an era of toleration between the two great Hindu sects; but the passing of centuries, and a couple of attempts, subsequent to the Muhammadan invasion in the early fourteenth century, to revive craft inspiration by princely patronage only served to demonstrate the fact that Indian art, separated from religious zeal (which in modern times need not necessarily express itself in sectarian theology), is incapable of life. The villages of artists have dwindled to a group of families of hereditary sculptors and image-makers in Swamimalai, three miles west of Kumbakonam, an ancient seat of Vedantism. Even they, as Mr. Gangooly

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

found, have forgotten some of the rules laid down in the text-books of their craft (the *Silpasastras*); and so little do they matter in modern life that a gazetteer makes no reference to this last remnant of the great age of Indian art-crafts—crafts that are not, as Sir John Woodroffe says in his preface to Mr. Gangooly's book, "a freak of Asiatic barbarism, but worthy representatives of a school of æsthetic performance as logical, articulate and highly developed as those of any country in Europe, ancient or modern."

It does not follow, however, that any essential inferiority of status on the part of art, or any derivative relationship to religion is implied in the fact that, when religious fervour died away, artistic activity subsided, and failed to be revived under the most distinguished patronage where the religious stimulus was wanting. Indian religious art was, indeed, some degrees above Indian religious practice (a customary and world-wide phenomenon), for while religious practice could not, with the vast majority of worshippers,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

go beyond their own emotional and mental boundaries, the ancient *sastric* canons of temple art developed the characteristics of the images beyond those of the human form, while retaining a general form-relationship with humanity, and thus set the images beyond the range of realism.

But apart from this consideration, the reliance of artistic impulse on religious impulse was not a reliance on something extraneous, as it is in the West, but on something integral, something as essential to the Indian artist as visualisation to a dramatist or motor-power to a sculptor. Indian art can no more flourish in the dry and wan light of scientific rationalism than European art can in the flames of the Great War; and the western mind will not come near an appreciation of Indian art, with all the enrichment and expansion of consciousness that (as I can personally testify) such an appreciation carries with it, until it *realises* that, to India, religion is not a view of life, or a phase of life, but *is* life.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

As to the *Silpasastras*, the written laws governing the image-maker's art to which I have referred, they provide for every detail on the form side. The *dhyana mantram*, or contemplative verse, explains the iconography of the particular image—the characteristics of the Deity portrayed, the number of limbs, the weapons, and the like. Measurements are laid down as to the sizes of the images and the proportions of the parts; poses and their meanings are fixed; and there is a "highly formalised gesture language" as Mr. Gangooly calls it, "*finger plays*, not in accordance with human gesture, but devised to show refinement of feeling through refinement of external action on the part of a superhuman personality." Dr. Coomaraswamy has recently given us an extended presentation of this ancient gesture language in a small but intensely interesting book entitled "The Mirror of Gesture."

The question arises as to how far these *sastric* rules, with their weight of traditional authority, are calculated to help or hinder the expression of the artist's indi-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

vidual genius without which, art, ceasing to be creation, ceases to be art. I am inclined to think that the question is as irrelevant as it is obvious, and that the *sastric* laws have no more and no less to do with Indian temple art than the laws of gravity and light have to do with naturalistic art in India or elsewhere. They are simply minimum conditions of life in a relative universe. The moulder of a prancing horse has, willy nilly, to restrict himself to four legs and their expressional possibilities. The restriction is an imposition, of course, but is also the instrument of the artist 'toward expression. A horse with only four legs is somewhat better than no horse at all in an artist's chamber of imagery. So it is with the Indian image-maker. The wise ones of old time recognised the need for expansion and modification of formal details in the representation of super-personal personalities: these are as the laws of gravity and light to the temple artist: he is not a reproducer of naturalistic facts, but a revealer of idealistic concep-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

tions, and within his sphere he is as free as the naturalistic artist. It is only the authority of the lower personality, with its frenzy for separation and differentiation, that is tyrannical : the authority of principle, raised above the destructive flames of passion aud passionate emotion, is a steady fire of co-ordination ; and the *sastras* carry all the authority of principle since they regulate the symbolical expression of metaphysical psychological truth.

But, indeed, the question as to the limiting power of the *sastras* is answered by the illuminating fact that the patronage of the Nayaks, who later than the Cholas ruled in Madura ; of the Mahrattas when they extended their sway as far south as Tanjore, or of the short lived Vijayanagar kings of the middle Deccan (to name them in historical sequence), failed to bring back the Chola golden age. The *sastras* were there : the artists were there ; but all the *sastras* hammered into one could not produce a work of vital art without the vitalising power of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

religious enthusiasm. The *sastras* to-day cannot create artists; neither could they in past times stifle real artists; for, despite laws of size and proportion, pose and gesture, Mr. Gangooly points out that "if one compares different examples of the same theme, it will be found that they have been treated with artistic skill varying with the degree of the genius or technical power of each performer." "The rules and regulations," he declares, "are only limitations for the mediocre and the incapacitate."

It would appear therefore, that if Indian art-crafts are to share in the new Renaissance, their revival will not spring from the alleged buried treasures of Indian princes, or from academical studio or cafe discussions (that derivative source of much of the febrile inspiration of western arts), but from hearts and minds quickened by religious zeal. Such zeal may or may not find itself conterminous with political or linguistic activity, it may or may not hark back to past circumstances, or seek to simulate

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

them in the present. It does not matter. Indian art does not hang to any great extent on history; it is, rather, perpetually capable of making history, because its inspirational source is close to the stratum of human nature in which the springs of action take their rise. A simple impulse of devotion is all that is needed. In the temple crafts it *may* call for the definition of a sectarian revival, though it is not improbable that the next great movement in the religious life of India will be towards pulling down the walls between the shrines of Siva and Vishnu rather than strengthening them; while in the development of general art-crafts on naturalistic lines, the devotional impulse may be directed towards India herself.

An alternative to the inspiration of devotion to God or Motherland may be found in devotion to Art itself, not for itself, but in service to the community through the fusion of art and religion—not the religion of creeds and ceremonies only, but of vision and realisation. Here all

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

questions of authority or individuality will cease; for the simple diversity that comes of spiritual vision, rather than the separatist and grandiose urge of passion or emotion, will have its expression both ratified and enriched by the incontrovertible authority of experience and conviction.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE BENGAL PAINTERS

FIRST IMPRESSIONS—1916

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE BENGAL PAINTERS

FIRST IMPRESSIONS—1916

One of the most prominent elements in the Renaissance in India is the school of Indian painting in Calcutta, the development of which has been phenomenal as regards the number of artists who have been drawn into the movement since it defined itself ten years ago, and also as regards the recognition of the quality of its work in the critical centres of Paris and London. The inception of the movement is dated about fifteen years ago, when Mr. E. B. Havell, the headmaster of the Calcutta School of Art turned the attention of his students to their native art sources, and so kindled the genius of one student who was destined to succeed Mr. Havell as principal, and to inspire the new school of Bengal painters—Abanindranath Tagore, nephew of the great poet.

The work of the school soon attracted the attention of lovers of art in Bengal,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and led to the formation of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, whose eighth annual exhibition it was my pleasure to see in Calcutta in January 1916. My preparation for appreciating the exhibition was the memory of the stir which certain pictures by a band of Indian artists had created in Paris and London a couple of years previously, and some knowledge of their characteristics through reproduction. I was not, however, prepared for the shock of delight that I experienced when I found myself in the buzz of a vital movement, with its enunciation of ideals, its expectancy, its interaction of character and personality, that took me straight back to the early days of the Irish Literary Revival, when every second person one met in Dublin had a poem or a play in some state of fulfilment in his pocket, and we talked "construction" and "technique" over cups of coffee in various places that, at this distance in space and memory, have gathered around them the atmosphere of places of holy pilgrimage.

The Calcutta exhibition of 1916 was

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

held in a small shop opening immediately off a busy street where Europe and Asia gazed at one another in a chequer of architecture and names. The exhibition room was very simply and tastefully set out. A white background showed up the hundred exhibits not one of which boasted anything resembling an orthodox frame. Grouped pictures were simply pinned on wooden screens: single pictures were mounted in *passe-partout*. The impression created was one of cleanness, reticence, composure, and certainty.

I had the good fortune of coming upon the two masters of the school, Abanindranath Tagore and his brother Gogonendranath, putting the final touches to the room, and thus had the advantage of that personal touch that is the best door to understanding.

Abanindranath is the dominee of the movement—though that term has to be sobered down to the fineness and graciousness of the East. He takes an obvious pleasure in disclosing the content of a picture in its idealistic or technical

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

sense, and it is all one whether the picture is his own or someone else's. Exposition is to him second-nature, and he carries it off with very quiet strength. His brother Gogonendranath would hardly be taken as a member of the same family. He is short, stout, like a quiet Irish Catholic priest, with the eyes of a seer. Later, when I had so studied the exhibition that I could walk in my memory from picture to picture clearly visualised, I told him that the exhibition chiefly struck me by what was *not* in it, that was, the passion and struggle of the West to hold on to beauty that was seen to be slipping away. I expressed the conviction that this was due to the fact that he and his brother and sister artists ignored death and saw only life. He seemed to be moved as if I had come upon a secret, and touched a purpose that, by being made explicit, might do an injustice to the authenticity and spontaneity of their art, but he confessed that life and its joy was their only theme.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

An exhibition of paintings such as those of the new Bengal school is calculated to make some very sharp cleavages amongst the convictions of many lovers of art, particularly, of course, among those nurtured in or desirous of following the traditions of Europe. A certain healthy divergence of opinion is always sure to arise where highly specialised minds are faced with some unusual ebullition from the hot-springs of artistic creation; but there is also always a danger that, where the new thing is somewhat remote from the observer's special interests, the link of sympathy may not be found, and loss may be experienced on both sides. A story is told of a mathematician who was pressed by a musical friend to hear one of Wagner's music-dramas. His verdict was that it was all right—but what did it prove? The mathematical mind demanded *q.e.d.* at the end of the play; instead, he should have looked for new life in exalted emotion and deepened perception: or, rather, he should have *looked* for neither—for the supreme essen-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

tial for the perfect appreciation of any art-expression is the merging of the personal consciousness with the subject, be the subject an abstract idea, a stone on the highway, or a picture on a wall.

That, of course, is a counsel of perfection, and takes no account of bad art which sets a challenge of inefficiency or vulgarity between the observer and the thing seen. Complete mergence is only possible where complete affinity exists among the elements ; though an affinity of spirit will set up a friendly tendency on the lower degrees of mental and bodily presentation. In the present state of the arts, however, in the West, the spiritual degree, as known in the East, has not been reached. The abstract and metaphysical has not yet appeared as an integral and perfectly natural element in the make-up of the artist and his art. The intellectual and structural degrees have been developed to a high pitch, the passional and formal have been raised to an astonishing power of mutual expression ; and it is on these levels of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

mental and emotional activity that this new creative effort of the East will meet with keenest criticism.

Such criticism will vary in intensity and wisdom in accordance with the relationship of the two great elements that are the protagonists of the struggle of artistic evolution—*idiosyncrasy* and *predilection*,' the collision of new and bewildering incursions from the future against the established canons of the past. Where the artist is also critic, the passage from past to future may be made without much disturbance by a gentle bowing of his idiosyncrasy towards the predilection of his time. Where the critic is also artist, the predilections of subject and method will seize upon the obvious aberrations of the new work, and are likely to lose the focus of the entire picture.

In order, however, to get the best enjoyment from the works of art that come in our way, we should put them perhaps through the same process as the smiling cat in the tree in Wonderland: make everything recede until nothing but the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

smile remains. In this way the heightened emotion of the past may enrich the future in the recalling of its essence, whereas the recollection too vividly of its bodily presentation may cause bewilderment. I have stood in the Louvre and revelled in the immortal smile of the Mona Lisa. I have also stood in Calcutta before another and a stranger figure—a mutilated sculpture of a temple girl of Konarak, a once famous and populous centre of pilgrimage now pathetically glorious in incomparable ruins and isolation among the sandy wastes of the Orissa coast of India. Somewhere out of the shadowy realm the gentle and bland smile of the Italian woman thrilled sisterly to the somewhat weary but exquisitely sweet smile of the Indian girl, but held back any intrusion of artistic predilection, and left me free to rejoice in the consciousness of eternal enrichment by another immortal creation.

It is difficult to put into sufficiently thin and pellucid language these intimate experiences of the Soul in her rela-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

tions with the protean Beauty that is freed and imprisoned in the arts. After all, experience tells us that it is better to over-praise than to blame; for where there is creation there is some simulation if not a veritable spark of the Divine flame, while criticism is little more than a parasite of the arts.

Between art and criticism there is the relationship that comes from a concealed unity beneath their surface activities of intuitive hazard on one side, and rational testing on the other. Through struggle and pertinacity, criticism may in time find itself at the height that art took in a leap—but the goal and the way thereto were art's first. It is this initiative, this spirit which is never sighted otherwise than in an attitude for flight, that bewilders and humiliates criticism. The province of criticism is limited to the area of the actual; its sustenance is taken from the spoils of art; its besetting sin is the corruption of the oncoming legions of the art of to-morrow with trophies won from the art of yesterday.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Art is, of course, likewise debtor to criticism ; but art must never forget that what it owes to criticism is a mere fraction of what criticism filched from it. Sad indeed is the day when any phase of art puts its soul in pawn to criticism. This is a special danger in the path of the Renaissance in India. Here and there it is said that a former danger of the Bengal artists' succumbing to western influence has been succeeded by the appearance of a more than desirable degree of influence from the Far East ; and one reflects that the chasing of influences is an admirable pastime when there is nothing better to do, but is rather a hindrance to joy in the presence of obvious authenticity and the originality of earnestness and devotion, that can never stray far or remain long away from its own centre.

It is hardly possible that artists worthy of the name could escape or resist the temptation to make trial of the ways and means of their contemporaries. The influence of Japan is evident, but it appears to extend only to method. The influence

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

that Europe has sought to exert on the new school is deeper and more dangerous. It is well that the art of India should be enriched by the advancement in the technique and mechanics of the West; but enrichment will assuredly turn to poverty if the artists of India allow themselves to be lured away from their own vision and their own method. There is a world of temptation in the praise which a French critic bestows on the supposed "sacrifice of richness of colouring and freedom of form which the artists have made in order to produce a specifically Indian art." This is the voice of the tempter whispering them away to the gaining of the whole world and the losing of their own Soul, by suggesting that something is missed in not following the western riot of passion in the arts.

I heard it said also that the eighth annual home exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art was somewhat below the level of its predecessors in the quality of the work presented; whereupon I congratulated myself on my advantage

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

over other critics in seeing the work of the new school for the first time in the illuminating atmosphere of its own environment, and in enjoying the full force of its revelation without the disability of that subtle traitor, memory. It was enough of artistic joy to me to learn that a number of little pictures of exquisite conception and execution were the first attempts in a new *metier* by a master of another *metier*. In such adaptability of mind and hand one had the sure sign of progress. An annual presentation of similars would mean only a marking of time.

My first impression of the work of the Bengal painters was one of microscopic delicacy: my last impression was one of largeness and strength. I think this change was due to the gradual perception of something deeper and subtler than the art, pressing through it into speech. One caught, first here, then there, then everywhere, hints of an overshadowing Divinity, and of a comprehension of the spiritual truth that the renowned relative

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

of the leaders of the school, Rabindranath Tagore, has put into the question:

> My poet, is it thy desire to see thy creation through my eyes?

The artist has in some way given eyes to the Hidden One: the observer looks back through those eyes, and gets through them a glimpse of the eternal. I may better communicate what I mean by a comparison. In a book on Italy, recently published, there is a reproduction of a picture by Edwin Bale. A church procession in white robes winds along a road towards the observer. There is a background of wooded hillside, with a white building and large yew-trees: distant hills are suggested. The movement of the procession is fully realised: its sensuous motion is palpable. Placing this picture alongside one of the Indian paintings, one feels that one can go to Como any year and see the same procession of the Body of the Lord winding along the same road; but one can never again see what the Indian artist saw and fixed; one visionary moment made permanent

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

out of the flux of humanity and nature. You can find in nature what you can find in a Tagore picture, for the artists are always true to nature; but when you return to nature you realise that something is wanting unless you share with the artist the ability to catch a flying glimpse of the revelation, the glimpse that comes from looking *through* nature, not *at* nature. This exaltation of effect is not obtained by the Indian painters through any special methods that are occult to the outsider. It is the result of a temperamental quietness that at the point of crisis needs only to stress a note. The difference between much of the melodramatic art beyond India and the art of the Bengal school is like the difference between the strut of the ordinary actor, who starts on a loud note, and then has to strain for his "points," and the restrained art of the new schools of drama (such as the Irish players of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, or the Elizabethan Stage Society) in which speech and gesture are so quietly toned that a small inflection of the voice or the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

lifting of a finger, becomes invested with profound significance.

In order that one may fully enjoy this special quality of the Indian paintings, it is necessary that the approaches to the mind be jealously guarded. These artists do not compel, any more than a saint, with the wisdom and purity of ages, could compel a loud-lunged and excited braggart. There must be a preparation for enjoyment, a composing of the cruder senses and preoccupations, such as one adopts as a preliminary to the proper hearing of a piece of good music. This is not a confession of weakness in the work : it is merely a common-sense acceptance of the natural fact of life, that the perceptive side of the mind has a trick of making sudden evaluations according to the strength of the impacts upon it, and only later, in reflection, of verifying the first conclusions. A highly coloured piece of vulgarity may at first glance obscure a work of infinitely greater value which may be less obvious in its first appeal. One has seen a wise

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and beautiful soul reduced to silence in the company of loud triviality, and heard the verdict that he or she was dull beside the brilliance of the others. So it is with these Indian painters with their predilection for the delicacy of water colour, and the concentration of small areas. Their art of painting, like their native music, is full of overtones and undertones, and moves in a pure lyricism that is innocent of false accent, or of what is worse, over-emphasis. This special characteristic is not confined to technique. It is part of their natural and racial attitude to life. It would not be true to say that they attach equal value to all the diverse manifestations of life; but their conception of these manifestations, as but shadowings forth of One Life, their frank and therefore unexaggerated acceptance of the senses, their laying of the ghost Death, appear to bring into closer and friendlier association the ideas and emotions that form the subject-matter of the painter's art. This is the secret of their unity, and the unseen cause of the charge of imitation

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

that is quite falsely levelled at the younger members of the school.

One obvious effect of this attitude is a reduction of the element of violent contrast in the work of the Indian artists. Their detachment from elementary passion, their lack of protest against the slipping away of things held precious by others, does not make for vigour and movement of a physical or mental kind. This is their main psychological distinctiveness. It puts them as far as the East is from the West in contrast with the emotional inspiration of practically the whole of European art. To the art of the West, "Life," as Swinburne puts it though not in this connection, "has Death for neighbour." There is a skeleton in the studio of every painter, whispering of an inartistic anti-climax among ugliness and corruption, as the termination to a mean filching of the warmth of desire and the joy of life. There is, moreover, the shadow of future forgetfulness: the ego-sense cannot tolerate the thought of unborn millions to whom the present

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

personality may not be even a name. Out of this arises the struggle and noise of the western arts; their throwing into bold relief of the things desired, as if to force remembrance on oblivion.

Especially is this so in the dealing of western art with womanhood. The distinctively feminine traits are emphasised, less as symbols of eternal qualities, than because of the special value which masculinity puts upon them for itsown pleasure. It is the other way round with the modern Indian painters. Woman is not to them "the lesser man," as Tennyson has it; she is the *other* man, as man is the other woman; and both are complementary differentiations of a spiritual unity. In another life, a man may be a woman and a woman a man, and each life is a phase of one continuous existence in which there is no Lethe stream. This is not to these artists a "theory;" it is the natural traditional background of all their activity, and until its influence on the art of the East is grasped, the criticism of the West may well put itself through the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

salutary discipline of reserving judgment of the murderous kind meted out by magazine writers and Mr. Ruskin.

What effect the intensive power of this new artistic life will have upon the art of the world is a matter for interesting reflection. It is certain that it will be felt, for this movement is manifestly only in its beginnings. The work done heretofore is of the nature of prophecy, not of "finished and finite clods." This is not to say that it "shows promise" in the amateurish sense. On the contrary, there is in all of what we may call the adult work of the school an extraordinary sense of perfect completeness in subject and expression, a mastery of idea and craft that appears to indicate finality within the scope of the particular work under the eye.

In the work of the junior artists, the word "promise" must take on a wider meaning. The look of wistful expectation, of hopeless hope, on the face of the mother in "The Flood," by Shrimati Pratima Devi, is an achievement far

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

beyond the range of what is usually denoted by the humble catalogue term "class work."

There is a further element in the sense of artistic prospect through these pictures, rather than of retrospect through work done; that is, the coming in of a more direct dealing with nature and humanity. This might appear to threaten a danger to the inner vision, the emotional and spiritual revelation that is the special characteristic of the new Indian school. Long attention to the superficies of things might have as sequel a superficial art. This may be so with painters of younger races; but it is more likely that the traditional and innate search of India for essences through forms will have the ultimate result of uplifting naturalism in East and West. Something of this tendency is seen in such a picture as "The Mother," by Surendranath Kar, a tender and naturalistic handling of a universal theme, a woman nourishing life by watering flowers.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

There is, indeed, in all the nature works of the school an element of freshness that makes them less consciously pictures of things seen than disclosures of the emotional affinity that has been established between the artist and his subject. They appear to have touched the Wordsworthian power of "emotion recalled in tranquillity," for there is in them a sense of repose, as basis to the emotion, that is far other than the fuss and haste that comes through paintings done direct from nature. There is a picture entitled "The Mother" by Sj. Charu Chandra Roy. A woman suckles her child. It is completely realised and worked out in detail; but the instinct of the artist has taken him past any artistic offence; his lights are lowered to a degree at which realism and refinement are one; and the picture, instead of being merely that of a woman suckling a child, is a revelation of the cosmic solicitude of motherhood through a feminine vehicle. The effect appears to be due to the findings of a new medium in a fusion of the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

detailed observation of realism with the suggestiveness of impressionism.

The fusion does not, however, mean that there is in the artists' work the evidence of inharmonious technique or overlaying of style. In order to make this clear it is necessary to recall a couple of the main methods of realism and impressionism.

The realistic aim is to present things as they are actually seen : the impressionistic aim is to express qualities through the things seen. In the western development of the arts there has been a state of armed neutrality between the devotees of these two schools, and the attitude of separateness has led naturally to some exaggeration on both sides. The tendency of realism has been to lay too much stress on sight, and to overlook the inevitable subjective element that underlies every conscious operation. Realism ceases to be real when it forgets that every turn of the eye is an act, not of sight, but of interpretation: that the "naked

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

eye" view has no existence save in a phrase.

On the other hand, the tendency of impressionism has been to sacrifice the vehicle to the idea, to reduce form to formlessness, and to render necessary the mastery of a conventional symbolism on the part of those who desire to understand and enjoy.

It appears to me, however, that the painters of the modern Indian school, on certain sides of their work, have succeeded in fulfilling the ideals of both realism and impressionism by a clear recognition of the necessary interplay of the visual faculty with the interpretative. Like the impressionists, they express qualities; there is not a picture that I saw that is not vibrating with emotion: but the attainment of that expression is nowhere at the expense of the embodiments through which the emotion is expressed. They observe the limitations of form and colour for the articulation of that which is beyond shape and size; but they do not smash the image in order to set free its soul:

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

instead, they operate by a characteristic subtilisation of technique that in this particular phase of their work reduces detail to a minimum, yet gives a complete and adequate visual presentation without shock or monstrosity, and at the same time makes the spiritual disclosure with keen conviction.

It is probably because of this fusion, that one finds hardly a suggestion, in an exhibition of the works of the Indian painters, of the assertive virtuosity that gives one in a western gallery of either school a disconcerting sense of noise and braggadocio. One feels free, even in the hearing of the Indian artist, to outrage all the conventions of modesty with enthusiastic praise, because each picture is a creation; it seems to exist by virtue of a life and a love of its own. There is, for instance, a pencil study by one of the younger of the artists of Mukul Chunder Dey, a figure of utter simplicity, seen in a flash, set down with a turn of the wrist in a clean line; yet so evocative is it of tender grace that it is only as by

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

an afterthought that one realises that the beautiful face is an essential conclusion of one's own invention, since the artist has not indicated so much as a feature. In this as in other cases one feels inclined not so much to congratulate the artist on the production of a beautiful work, as on enjoying the privilege of being related by birth to a thing of beauty.

Personality, therefore, of the emphatic type that is characteristic of so much of the art of Europe, is not to be found in these painters of the East. It would almost seem to matter very little if we discovered that a picture attributed to a master was really the work of a student, or *vice versa*. Certainly their sonnet-like "scanty plots of ground" afford no such clues to identification as the big canvasses of the impressionists gave to Mr. George Moore, whereby he could tell the painter by the turn of a brush or the direction of a knife. The jewelled finish of some of the mythological work is so close as to hide the process, and we have to look for deeper clues, for gradations of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

strength, for differences of composition or a freer use of larger areas of simple colouring, such as distinguish the noble work of Nanda Lal Bose from that of a similar class by other painters of his school.

But what is lost—if, indeed, it is a loss—of personality, is many times repaid in the manifestation of a fundamental unity—not the unity of a series of reflections of a central light, but the signs and tokens of a single purpose bearing down upon the artists from the hidden sources of things, and compelling them to a subtly co-ordinated expression of the India that is beautiful, and the beauty that is India.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE BENGAL PAINTERS

SECOND IMPRESSIONS—1918

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE BENGAL PAINTERS

SECOND IMPRESSIONS—1918

Two years ago I saw for the first time the work of the new school of Bengal painters in Calcutta. The exigencies of War have prevented the holding of a further exhibition by the Indian Society of Oriental Art until December, 1917, and January, 1918. The lapsed period provides one with an excellent opportunity of studying the various phases of the progress of the movement, since it is just sufficiently long to allow those phases to show themselves clearly, and not too long to break the sense of continuity.

If the movement is vital, not merely epidemic and transient, it must attract and inspire new workers, it must show a forward tendency in the work of already recognised members, and it must show a springtime search after variety in the expressions of its life. The present exhibition responds liberally to these three

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

requirements. It is notable for the inclusion of the first pictures of several young painters who show independence and power in their work. One of the first pictures to attract my eye on a preliminary glance round the room was a little unnamed and uncatalogued piece that seemed less a picture of light than a patch of sunset glory held between sky and river. I noticed later that, even when the sunlight passed near it, the picture lost nothing of its own brightness. It stood the test of nearness to nature because it added to nature's light the glow of enthusiasm and love and discovery. Mr. Mandal (Mahadev Mandal is the young artist's name) shows another little picture of a woman setting a light afloat on the sacred river, an excellent embodiment of mystery and devotion. There is nothing derivative about the two little first pictures: they are authentic and convincing.

I was told that the young artist was employed in a business office through which some of the pictures of the Cal-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

cutta artists went for framing. These had attracted his attention and ultimately stirred him to emulation. In a somewhat similar way the genius of another young artist made herself known to him, and led to the uncatalogued inclusion of "In the Dark Night," a woman feeling her way with outspread arms across a dark chamber. That is the subject of the picture, and it is all that, rightly, appeals to the eye at a first glance. But when we look longer and closer, our eyes appear to become accustomed to the darkness and to catch detail after detail: the transparent scarf through which the woman's form is seen, the stone carvings on the window sides, the country and river beyond. It is an expert performance from which very little is taken by the recollection of a small picture similar in subject by the master Abanindranath which the young artist may or may not have seen. The little picture is also a heartening prophecy. So is "The Mirror of Truth," a first exhibit by a brother of the artist mentioned, which shows a beauty looking

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

into a handglass, and finding a death's-head reflected in it.

Durgasunkar Bhattacharya is also a newcomer. His "Forsaken Radha" drew me from the far corner of the room with its tender dejection, and disclosed the same loving care in workmanship, the same detail, and the same subordination of the detail to the central idea or emotion that one sees all through the work of these artists both old and young. There is also the first work in caricature by another young artist to which I shall refer more particularly later. A movement that can provoke five such diverse and strong creative centres into activity has the thing of life pulsing through it.

As regards individual development, one does not look for great leaps or dramatic changes in the work of the elders of the school. The ratio of variation normally diminishes as the artist approaches his style. Abanindranath Tagore is still Abanindranath, perfect in vision and technique, adding to his animal and nature studies of the previous exhibition

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

a series of ten fascinating pictures from Rabindranath's play, "The Cycle of Spring." He also shows a pair of river scenes that are similar to his series "From Puri to Konarak" in being executed with the minimum of work, but have more atmosphere and a deeper power of suggestion. Nanda Lal Bose maintains his splendid virility in idea, colour and line. "The Dance," white on brown, is a piece of beautiful draughtsmanship with just sufficient departure from text-book anatomy to make it art. One is glad to see again his great "Krishna and Arjun," which strikes me as being one of the most powerful and most Indian pictures ever painted. Gogonendranath Tagore is as tender and satisfying as ever, but he provides the surprise of the exhibition by revealing another Gogonendranath, a dual personality to whom I shall return.

Among the younger artists I notice a development in area and technique. There are quite a number of large paintings, the most important of which artistically (apart from the *tour de force* by

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Abanindranath Tagore and Nanda Lal Bose, "Rituraj—King of the Seasons," a piece of tempera work that has all the breadth and almost all the brilliancy of oils, and shows that the artists can outwestern the West when they choose) is a monochrome on silk entitled "Companion of the Road," by Surendranath Kar. The subject is perfectly simple. A man and woman in peasant garb are walking along a road, the man playing a flute. Probably most of the readers of these lines have just now visualised the man and woman with their faces towards the observer, the man showing his affection for his companion in a gentle inclination towards her. That however is not the method of the young Bengali artist. There is a vital unity between the two figures, but it is not labelled by look or gesture: it is far more subtle and moving because it is *in* neither the one nor the other, but comes *through* both from an enfolding power beyond them. Looking at the picture one recalls Rabindranath's line.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

O far to seek ! O the keen call of thy flute

and the longer one looks at the work the more one becomes aware of a third invisible companion shepherding two souls into the unity of the spirit. Through the hand of the painter, the Devi of Colour (to whom George Meredith paid homage in a glorious hymn that every art lover should have by heart) makes sisterly recognition to the Devi of Sound. Then one becomes aware of another companion —oneself, for with exquisite genius the painter has turned the backs of the travellers towards us, so that the inner and outer eye go with them along the road to nowhere in the picture but to joy in the heart, and we follow them as invisible sharers in their companionship.

Two years ago I was struck with the evocative and indirect symbolical power shown by Mr. Kar in a small picture called " The Mother," in which the essence of motherhood was as movingly shown as the essence of companionship is shown in the picture under notice. Mr. Kar works in types and evokes qualities, and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

establishes a close sympathy between his subject and the observer.

I have referred to Mr. Kar's former study of motherhood. There is another "Mother" this year, from the pencil of Asit Kumar Haldar, whose "Pranam" was one of the most interesting pencil works in the previous exhibition and is shown again this year. My attention was called to Mr. Haldar's "Mother" by Sir Rabindranath, its owner, to whom its tenderness makes a strong appeal. Besides its tenderness I noticed that suggestive touch which I have mentioned in Mr. Kar's treatment of "Companion of the Road." One can recall pictures of "Mother and Child," in which the mother gazes on the infant or at the observer, in either case proclaiming what is called in the West "maternity swank." But neither the mother nor the child in Mr. Haldar's sketch pays the slightest heed to the audience; neither does the mother pay any heed on the surface to the child that is mauling her with inquisitive hands, but one *feels* the solicitude of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

motherhood in every line, just as one feels the sense of affection in the "companions" though it is not labelled. Mr. Haldar is equally successful in a brush drawing, "Old and Young," in which the wistful face and blind eyes of age gaze far into vacancy over the head of the guiding youth. This sketch reminds one of Mr. O. C. Gangooly's set of three paintings on the story of the blinded prince Kunal, and calls up a regret that that big painter is represented this year by so small a contribution as appears under his name.

To return to the larger works; Nabendranath Tagore, a son of Gogonendranath, has developed from his small but excellent pictures of two years ago into panel work of outstanding excellence, on silk. Pratima Devi gives us the antithesis in colour and emotion of her former impressively melancholy "Flood," in a couple of vivid reproduction of Ajanta frescoes on wooden panels.

Mukul Chunder Dey, who was represented, I think, only in pencil at the last

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

exhibition, is here an innovator, and shows some very promising results of his study of etching during his recent tour to Japan and America with Sir Rabindranath. His ink drawing of the great Bengali poet is a gem of artistic portraiture. He pushes out feelers in an uncatalogued painting in low tone, "In the Fields," a picture of a woman tending cattle which is invested with a Millet-like emotion and atmosphere, a circumstance which has in it an element of danger. I do not think, however, that Mr. Dey will become occidentalised: he is too truly an artist to desert himself or his country. His book of pencil portraits of a group of prominent Bengalis (recently published by the Vichitra Press, Dwarkanath Tagore's Lane, Calcutta) should be in the hands of everyone who desires to help India to attain her proper place in the arts. The portraits are not merely surface presentations of the faces of Indian leaders, but revelations of their character and genius.

I am inclined to think that the most

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

significant feature of the past two years' work of the modern Bengal school in painting, as summarised in this exhibition, is to be found in two series of humorous and satirical cartoons. I do not mean that artistically they are of the greatest value. I should not care to live in the same room with some of them for a week. The "terribly sympathetic" gentleman who is bound with red tape would rouse me to a most unsympathetic fury. That, of course, is the purpose of the painter; but purpose in art is its least stable element. The painters will pass on, and perhaps achieve inconsistency of purpose, but they will carry with them a new sense of freedom, a larger consciousness.

A few years ago the Bengal artists were charged with giving too much attention to the India of mythology and religion, and little or none to the natural India under their eyes. They replied in a crowd of nature pictures that appeared to be rather veils through which the soul of the scene was observed than superficial

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

transcripts of nature. 'I do not know if anyone has charged the painters with lack of human interest. If they have, these cartoons are an effective answer. The painters have not set their easels in the suburbs of life: they have walked bravely into its slums, and they have come away with laughter that is touched with just enough acerbity to make it curative.

The satirical element which was noticeable in the previous exhibition, particularly in certain sketches by Abanindranath Tagore under the general title of "Parody of Ideals," has developed with rapidity and effectiveness through his brother, Gogonendranath, who showed caustic symptoms in a sketch called, if I remember rightly, "The Critics," which I saw in reproduction a couple of years ago. A book of caricatures entitled (in Bengali) the *Thunder of Ridicule*, by Gogonendranath, was published a few months ago, and made this new development in the Bengal school known among art lovers outside Bengal. It

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

contained the following illuminating note on the duty of the artist:

> When deformities grow unchecked but are cherished by blind habit it becomes the duty of an artist to show that they are ugly and vulgar and therefore abnormal. This is the only excuse that can be offered to those to whom the following caricatures may succeed in giving offence.

Some of the originals of this book, and of a second book, *Realm of the Absurd*, are shown in the present exhibition. A general glance at them gathers the impression of the quick-wristed energy of the Australian cartoonist, Will Dyson, whose work is like a signature dashed off with a quill. But the eastern artist, with more philosophy and less impatience than the white revolter against his own race's products in monstrosity, stops before reaching the realistic exaggeration of actual personality which is the main feature of western caricature. One can see Mr. Dyson's models for his profiteers and fat men on the London Exchanges any day, even in war-time, and observe the bending of art to the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

work of social purgation: one can walk out of the Calcutta exhibition and collide with the provocative originals of Mr. Tagore's satires, but their representatives on the walls of the exhibition take their place not only in the "realm of the absurd" but in the realm of art, and justify absurdity by disclosing its artistic value.

Mr. Tagore's caricatures are studies not of personalities but of excesses or defects in qualities expressed through the symbolism of human action. The method of the artist seems to fall into three phases. Where the satire arises out of circumstances, rather than out of character, the figures are purely human. In the sketch entitled "Thief," for instance, a big policeman has captured two street urchins and their booty, a small piece of fruit; but the contrast between official comfort in puttees and umbrella with the rainy misery of the street and the obvious hunger of the captives, transfers the technical offence of petty larceny from the hungry urchins to the representative of a social organisa-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

tion that denies the children their bread. The same method is used in "The Forgotten Father," in which a superior young lady, tricked out in the fantastic Europeanism that no European would perpetrate, deigns to look at her old-fashioned father at a hint from her mother, the father and mother being dressed in simple Bengali clothing. The figures are actual *genre* studies, not caricatures; the sketch is a satire of circumstances that make Calcutta the laughing-stock of the rest of India in its imitation of European dress.

Where the satire has to be brutal, and touches delinquencies of individual and social character, the figures are not personal; they become types and symbols, but by a process of all-round exaggeration, not by the old "Punch" method of enlarging Mr. Gladstone's collar, or the Dyson method of fattening his victims beyond human possibility. "The Schoolmaster" is a fearsome individual with a caged bird in one hand and a book in the other, and might well become an illustration in the literature of the new Society for the Pro-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

motion of National Education, of the forcible-feeding method in "education" from which the Society is finding a way of escape for the caged spirits of Indian youth. "Bon Mari" in the same method is an expression of the mutual degradation of man and woman that arises out of a false marriage relationship.

The third phase of Mr. Tagore's method in satire is seen in "Hybrid Bengalensis," which takes off the local fashion of dressing western from the waist up and Bengali from the waist down. Mr. Tagore exposes the inconsistency by the simple device of setting it vertically instead of horizontally, that is, he dresses his figure in western garb down one side and in Bengali down the other.

Mr. Tagore's satires find excellent companionship in a set of cartoons by Chanchal Kumar Bannerji, a young artist who appears to have come to his own, with little or no apprenticeship, in a full equipment of vision and skill, though with gaps between the present and his utmost attainment sufficient to invest his

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

future with great interest. The young artist is more naive, more "funny" than the master. The method of both is clearly differentiated in their individual treatment of the same subject. I have referred to Gogonendranath's "Schoolmaster." Mr. Bannerji exhibits a cartoon entitled "First Aid to the Ignorant," which might also be called "The Schoolmaster." It shows a pedagogue in action, with stick under arm and book in hand, "imparting" knowledge to a weeping schoolboy—whose tears, however, are not invitations to knowledge but sequelae of the method of instruction. The picture leaves a laugh behind it. Mr. Tagore's, on the contrary, sets the mind off at a tangent from a preliminary smile to vague shadows of speculation among the convolutions of the brain on the subject of education.

Mr. Bannerji is an artist from whom much may be expected. He is not simply a caricaturist: he is an artist in caricature. He has fun. He has a deep medicinal earnestness. His "Doomed," with the pretty young woman side by

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

side with the sloppy-mouthed male creature and a deathly spectre, is a touching little picture expressing the tragedy of certain phases of life east and west, in perfect composition, and with lines that gives a subtle flame-like movement to the picture. Mr. Bannerji has also tenderness as shown in a sketch, "In the Evening," which is hardly to be catalogued as a cartoon. It is a study of an old man at prayer, full of repose and devotion.

I have said that Gogonendranath's satires find excellent companionship in Mr. Bannerji's cartoons. But Mr. Tagore the satirist is in other company that is at first sight bewildering, namely Mr. Tagore the painter of such a magical harmony as "Evening (Ranchi)," or a "Study" of a sage-like figure in a dark cave standing by the side of a square window rapt in contemplation of the sweet light of day. It is almost inconceivable that the brain that conceived and the hand that executed the delicate and mystical "Dawn (Raghini Bhairavi)"

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

of two years ago could have moved from the purity and ecstasy of morning on the seashore into what Emerson calls "the mud and scum of things." The connection, however, becomes observable when one grasps the true and only subject of these painters,—life. They themselves are alive, and love life. Hence they do not enter life's dark places merely as temperamental or professional fault-finders. They take with them the deep compassion of the sense of unity which is India's contribution to the thought of the world. Like Wordsworth's child, they trail clouds of glory with them across the twilight of human degradation. They see the something that is the soul of art in what are superficially the most inartistic circumstances. They repeat, *mutatis mutandis*, the words of the Hebrew Psalmist: "If I make my bed in Hell, behold Thou art there!" Because of this, they find something of sweetness in the heart of bitterness. Their artistic "cruelty" is not that of the political lampooner who sees only through the eye of partisanship, but the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

efficacious cruelty of Hamlet with kindness softening its hand. They attack ugliness beautifully, and in that element of beauty, ugliness contemplates not only its own character but the way of escape from it. They also make broader the path of the Renaissance by showing the artistic value of matters of everyday occurrence, for the vitality of literature and the arts springs out of the joy that accompanies a spectacular interest in the familiar.

It does not follow that the salutary influence of this new phase in the Bengal art movement will show itself in reforms in caste customs or in dress. The caricatures are one expression of a movement in the total consciousness of India towards truth. They are the utterances of the seer against 'the wrong of unshapely things," but their deepest significance is not social, it is artistic. "The painting is to the painter, and comes back most to him," as Whitman chanted; and these pieces of criticism through art are the guarantee of an intellectual and emotional quality that, being sincere and sponta-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

neous, will as readily turn itself inward as outward, and will save the work of the artists from humourless solemnity and sentimentality.

There are many other pictures to which I should like to refer; indeed there is hardly a work exhibited (including the few pieces of statuary) that has not a special excellence, but one can do no more than give a general consideration to the leading features of the work of the school. If I were asked to sum up in a word the quality of the work of these painters, I think I should say *poetical*, bearing in mind John Stuart Mill's definition of poetry as that which one overhears, in contrast with eloquence that is intended to be heard and that requires an audience. These pictures do not invite with glitter and noise. They commune with themselves, and those who have the eye to see along with them find entrance to a world of entrancing spiritual beauty.

The test of artistic achievement is joy; and in the work of the Bengal artists one can taste abandonment to Love and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Beauty in the sure consciousness that the infinite is leaning with approving tenderness on the finite. It would be difficult to assemble outside an exhibition of their paintings so thoroughly unified an expression of the pure spirit of the veritable *amateur*, the lover. It sets every jewel, it speaks in every curve; and to-day, while the young civilisations of the West are tumbling into a ruin of ideals and action in the great war (a ruin that is more tragic than the destruction of centuries of patient labour in the raising of beautiful architecture, that has been one of the incidents of the war) it is a consolation and an inspiration to contemplate the achievements and prophecies of the modern Indian school of painting, and to bathe in the joy of renascent youth that has behind it the steadying tradition of ages and the ageless vision of eternal Beauty. The total effect of their art is to give a sense of vibration raised one or more octaves; and whereas, in other schools of the painting art, one is oppressed by the feeling that a fragment of the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Spirit has been made fixed and finite, in the work of these Indian painters there is a joyous sense of release from the tyranny of the symbol and a passing through the seen to the unseen. In a word, they have learned the secret of raising the static to the ecstatic.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

RUSKIN, THE INDIAN RACE AND INDIAN ART

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

RUSKIN, THE INDIAN RACE AND INDIAN ART

In my Second Impressions of the Bengal Painters I referred to the testing of a piece of literature by the bringing of it face to face with nature. I saw the test applied by the afternoon sun of Calcutta to a little piece of pictured light, and the picture stood the test. Then it occurred to me that if literature and art may be the better judged face to face with their subject, so may literary criticism and art criticism be judged in front of the literature or the art that they criticise. The case in point was a lecture by John Ruskin which I remembered to have read, in which he had some highly coloured things to say of Indians and Indian art, and which now came to my mind with a queer feeling of incongruity, harshness, not to say impertinence (in the dictionary sense). I re-read the lecture in the presence of these modern examples of Indian genius, and as I did so I smiled..... and smiled.....

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

And yet, why smile? There is always the dangerous possibility of that kind of smile joining curses and chickens in their return to the place whence they went forth. One can smile indulgently upon poor old Homer who was unable to call up his friends on the telephone; or Kalidas who had no illustrated paper wherewith to while away his time on the alleged bullock-cart of his youth. But there is always the shadow of a super-smile about the race of the Future which may define itself on succeeding lips that know more but (as indicated by the smile) are no wiser than we.

For this reason, in those blood-rushes to the cheek when Mars plants his fiery flag there in answer to the challenge of Mr. Ruskin, I have applied the cooling remembrance that he was as ignorant of the matter on which he dogmatised to such adjectival purpose, as we are of the future. Still, when all due allowance has been made in respect of knowledge, there is left in Mr. Ruskin's lecture a residue of prejudice and inequit-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

able handling of even the known facts, that does such violence to the better parts of Mr. Ruskin, and such injustice to a great and ancient people, that I am moved to a rejoinder. I know that post-mortem criticism is not very profitable; nor indeed contemporary criticism. If one criticises a contemporary one is told that nearness makes a balanced judgment impossible; and yet it is only contemporary criticism that can be of any real service. Personally I refuse to act on the principle that criticism should be muzzled until both the critic and the criticised are dead. I believe that an intelligent, dignified but frank criticism of both past and present in literature and the arts is essential to the best interests of the Renaissance in India.

But there is criticism and criticism, and because Mr. Ruskin indulged in the one I propose to exercise the other (leaving the classification of each to the reader), though post-mortem criticism is not esteemed among acts of valour. That, however, depends on the deadness of the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

individual or the work under criticism. I am firmly convinced that John Ruskin, as John, is thoroughly dead, for I came upon his grave on a tramp from Wordsworth's side of the Lake District of England to Coniston, and wondered in a vague way at the quaint convolutions in the brain of Fortune that compelled the body of the lecturer on "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art" to rest under a monument thickly carved with conventionalised representations of his own works: surely a picturesque nemesis. But John Ruskin, as Ruskin, is not nearly so dead as some present-day writers would have us believe. His works (that is, his prose, for his poetry is among the things that one enjoys forgetting) have wandered from the uplands of library editions at high prices to the populous lowlands of penny editions, and enjoy the dangerous vitality of pulpit quotation, from which vantage-grounds Mr. Ruskin's writings maintain that attitude of infallibility which Mr. Ruskin could so well assume and make us imagine to be argument.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

In order that we may get a complete view of the matter, I shall here transcribe Mr. Ruskin's full charge against Indian art and the Indian nation. The charge is laid in the first of a series of lectures which he gave in Kensington Museum in 1858 (the year after the Mutiny, which is a point to remember) to an audience of art students. The particular lecture under notice is entitled "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art;" the series is given the general title of "The Two Paths." Says Mr. Ruskin:

> Among the models set before you.....for the teaching of design, there are, I suppose, none in their kind more admirable than the decorated works of India. They are, indeed, in all materials capable of colour...almost inimitable in their delicate application of divided hue and fine arrangement of fantastic line. Nor is this power of theirs exerted by the people rarely or without enjoyment; the love of subtle design seems universal in the race, and is developed in every implement that they shape and every building that they raise; it attaches itself with the same intensity and the same success to the service of superstition, of pleasure, of cruelty.

Mr. Ruskin then proceeds to contrast the highlanders of Scotland, who are careless of art, with the Indians who rejoice in it. He asks:

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

What is the effect on the moral character in each nation of this vast difference in their pursuits and apparent capacities? and whether those rude chequers of the tartan or the exquisitely fancied involutions of the Cashmere, fold habitually over the noblest hearts. We have had our answer. Since the race of man began its career of sin on this earth, nothing has ever been done by it so significant of all bestial and lower than bestial degradation as the acts of the Indian race in the year that has just passed. . . . And thus, on the one hand, you have an extreme energy of baseness displayed by these lovers of art: on the other . . . . . you have an extreme energy of virtue displayed by the despisers of art (the Scottish highlanders) . . . . . And thus you have the differences in capacity and circumstances between the two nations, and the differences in result on the moral habits of two nations, put into the most brief opposition. Out of the peat cottage come faith, courage, self-sacrifice, purity and piety, and whatever else is fruitful in the work of Heaven; out of the ivory palace come treachery, cruelty, cowardice, idolatry, bestiality —whatever else is fruitful in the work of Hell.

That will do for the present. It is sufficiently clear and compact: on one side stand the highlanders, inartistic and virtuous; on the other, artistic and vicious, the Indian race—the whole race, mark you: Hindu, Muhammadan, Buddhist, Parsi, (perhaps excluding Indian Christians), in an all-inclusive condemnation. We should not have known of the hellish possibilities of humanity, says Mr. Ruskin

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

but for the Indian mutineer; and if the mutineer revealed a new fact in human degradation to Mr. Ruskin, he in turn revealed a new fact in history (the kind of "history" that one evolves in moments of disordered imagination), the fact that the Indian mutineer was "the Indian race," and that the race came out of the "ivory palace!"

Some indulgence must, doubtless, be allowed to a man of sensitive temperament when he reacts with warmth to newspaper accounts of the slaughter of men, women and children of his own race. It is not at all certain, however, that Mr. Ruskin would have permitted the same warmth of expression on the part of, say, the highlanders of Glencoe when a leader of his own country, a couple of centuries earlier, found it expedient to wipe out a whole clan on the flimsiest pretext. Even if he permitted the warmth, he certainly would not allow without protest such an argument as this: "The English race is inartistic: a small class of that race murdered

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

a highland clan, therefore the whole English race is a race of murderers because it is inartistic." Yet that is precisely the argument of Mr. Ruskin as set out above. The whole people of India are held up to the execration of a crowd of ignorant art students because a small section of the vast population of a country that is itself a continent had done no more than Cromwell did on his campaign in Ireland, not to mention the Children of Israel.

It is not necessary to go into the question of the rights or wrongs of the Mutiny. All that we are concerned with is the exposure of the fallacious drift of Mr. Ruskin's emotions that led him into identifying the mutineers with the whole Indian race, and presenting the Mutiny as a horrible example of the deteriorative power of conventional art. The fallacy stands out still more glaringly when one recalls the fact that the Mutiny was suppressed by Indian troops, (a fact that was surely known to Mr. Ruskin, even if he was not aware of the other fact, that the Mutiny was a

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

mutiny of soldiers, not a revolt of a nation which, as I have pointed out in the first chapter, was but little affected by the varying fortunes of its Kshattrya caste in old time, and not more affected by their nineteenth century successors); but the assisting Indian soldiers are not taken as "the Indian race," and made sharers of the virtues of the peat cottage!

I have attributed the fallacy to Mr. Ruskin's emotions, for it is impossible to find a trace of that reflection of past to present, that interchange of equivalents in various disguises, that is the sign of the exercise of thought. Thought balances, weighs, sifts, dares to be true; but emotion, when it usurps the function of the mind, throws the universe out of equipoise and makes prejudice and exaggeration weigh the scales against the others. Had Mr. Ruskin paused in his emotional gallop to think for a moment, he would have couched his charge in soberer terms from the virtuous height of a civilization that yearly in cold blood, through social and industrial iniquities, kills more women and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

children than did the mutineers in an orgy of frenzy. Mr. Ruskin himself attacked that murderous system, but he did not blame the *English race* for it.

One crime, of course, does not justify another; but at the present stage of human evolution, a sense of mutual guiltiness is the nearest possible approach to honesty in charges involving the character of an individual or a race. Mr. Ruskin might not recognise the similarity between illegal sudden murder and legalised murder by inches, though the Scriptures to which he pinned his faith speak of a state of evolution in which he that kills an ox shall be as he that kills a man. Every artist, who is not blinded by religious bigotry or racial prejudice, will cry out against violence in all its forms; but Mr. Ruskin shrieks "murderers!" at "the Indian race" (for vile deeds in which the *people* had no part), yet speaks approvingly of the "avenging in the Indies" by the highlanders to whom his audience were "bound in close bonds of gratitude."

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

The highlanders were the exponents of whatever else is fruitful in the work of Heaven—one of which works would appear to be disobedience to the Bible which commands, "Thou shalt not kill," and declares, "Vengeance is mine, I will always repay." Again, I emphasise, we are not here concerned with the merits of the facts referred to, but with Mr. Ruskin's manner of dealing with them.

But while a disorderly emotion is the channel for this fallacious "reasoning," its source is religious intolerance. "Superstition" and "idolatry" were the softest words that Mr. Ruskin could find for the venerable faiths of the bulk of the human race. Indian art is put to the service "of superstition, of pleasure, or of cruelty." The "avenging" highlander from the "peat cottage" is an example of "piety," but the Indian mutineer (from the "ivory palace"!) is a monster of "idolatry." It is to the credit of Mr. Ruskin that he felt vaguely that someone might pick a hole in his argument. He admits,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

> From one instance of however great apparent force, it would be wholly unfair to gather any general conclusion, wholly illogical to assert that because we had once found love of art connected with moral baseness, the love of art must be the general root of moral baseness; and equally unfair to assert that, because we had once found neglect of art coincident with nobleness of disposition, neglect of art must be always the source or sign of that nobleness.

From this excellent pillorying of his own argument it would almost appear that Mr. Ruskin was on the point of apology to "the Indian race." Alas, it is only a stepping-off place from "our own recent experience" (to wit, the "lower than bestial" acts of the *entire people of India* on whom be fathers—and mothers—the mutiny, non-killing Buddhists and Brahmans, and inoffensive peasants being made one with a band of mutinous soldiery) to the records of history in which, according to Mr. Ruskin, we find "one great fact fronting us, in stern universality, namely, the apparent connection of great success in art with subsequent national degradation." What a quaint disclosure of a mind's limitation we have in the taking of an "apparent connection" as a *fact*, when in simple truth they are *two* facts,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and their juxtaposition is not a matter of history but of Ruskinian polemics.

> From the moment in which a perfect statue appears in Florence, a perfect picture in Venice, or a perfect fresco in Rome, from that hour forward, probity, industry, and courage seem to be exiled from their walls.

This is Mr. Ruskin's reading of history. It sounds complete and final. Its flaw is in being incomplete. It leaves out of account the curious circumstance that the achievement of national solidarity by Italy followed quite a gallery of pictorial masterpieces; that France has survived Corot and Ingres. Ruskin did not act on his own principle, and denounce the classical perfection of Leighton, or the genius of his own protege, Turner, as signs of a coming "national degradation" of England; nor have the Russian aristocracy cursed Verestchagin and burned his superb pictures as forerunners of the Revolution.

What utter nonsense such augmentation as this of Mr. Ruskin's is; and how doubly vicious when it is merely concocted (in all sincerity, no doubt, but the sincerity of one-eyed emotion) to

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

bolster up a lie against a great, cultured, peace-loving people, who, in many respects, have come nearer obedience to the injunctions of the Christianity of Jesus Christ than lip-servers who take sides with the Father of Lies in their thought and speech of the non-Christian peoples, notwithstanding the command, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

But there is something more to be said of Mr. Ruskin's "apparent connection" of artistic success and national degradation. "You find," he tells us, "that the nations which possessed a refined art were always subdued by those who possessed none." He gives a list: Lydian subdued by Mede, Athenian by Spartan, Greek by Roman, Roman by Goth, Burgundian by Switzer. Why does he not add Indian by Britisher? The whole purport of the argument is the alleged degradation of India, as evidenced in the Mutiny. Is he afraid of the truth that "national degradation," (the natural consequence of national presumption and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

pride, is the nemesis of conquest? Captive Greece "took captive her rude conqueror" not physically but intellectually. That captive India might in a similar way take captive *her* conqueror (all conquerors are ruder than the conquered, says Mr. Ruskin) is an unthinkable proposition, for is not her religion superstition, her piety idolatry, her ivory palaces (which are as substantial as present-day alleged hidden hoards of wealth) homes of all that is fruitful in the work of Hell—though how Hell, an invention of the Christian Middle Ages, can be connected with India is not stated!

How typical that attitude is of the bulk of so-called Christian thought when it turns itself eastward and sees only "falsehood" in the ideas of other great religions, as Mr. Ruskin (as blind as the mass of Christians to the real meaning of Christianity itself, and to the real meaning of other faiths) saw only falsehood in the four great religious movements that created the arts of Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Italy—the wor-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

ship of Osiris, Belus, Minerva and the Queen of Heaven: but I leave this attitude for further consideration when I come to deal with the religious and philosophical elements in the Renaissance in India in the chapter on "The Agamas and the Future."

And what of the art of India which, according to Mr. Ruskin, brought about the degradation of India and the Mutiny of 1857? Here is Mr. Ruskin's summary of its characteristics.

> It is quite true that the art of India is delicate and refined. But it has one curious character distinguishing it from all other art of equal merit in design—*it never represents a natural fact.* It either forms its compositions out of meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of line; or, if it represents any living creature, it represents that creature under some distorted and monstrous form. To all the facts and forms of nature it wilfully and resolutely opposes itself; it will not draw a man, but an eight-armed monster; it will not draw a flower, but only a spiral or a zig-zag.

Such is Indian art as seen by one of England's art-critics; and the critic does not hesitate to build up an India of his own on his principle that the art of a nation *produces* the nation (that produces the art!) Here is Mr. Ruskin's India.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

"It" (that is the art set out above) thus indicates that

> the people who practise it are cut off from all possible sources of healthy knowledge or natural delight, that they have wilfully sealed up and put aside the entire volume of the world and have got nothing to read, nothing to dwell upon, but that imagination of the thoughts of their hearts, of which we are told that "it is only evil continually." Over the whole spectacle of creation they have thrown a veil in which there is no rent. For them no stars peep through the blanket of the dark, for them neither their heaven shines nor their mountains rise, for them the flowers do not blossom, for them the creatures of field and forest do not live. They lie bound in the dungeon of their own corruption, encompassed only by doleful phantoms, or by spectral vacancy.

It is perhaps necessary to explain that the author of the above is not a humourist. If Mr. Ruskin had ever been found guilty of real humour, we could imagine a twinkle in his eye as he rolled off this absurdity about a people who "have got nothing to read" (except the Vedas and the colossal literature of philosophy), for whom "no stars peep through the blanket of the dark" (though practically every action of life is undertaken with the guidance of the stars), for whom "the flowers do not blossom" (though everywhere and at all

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

times flower decoration and offering characterises Indian religious and social life), for whom "the creatures of field and forest do not live" (though the bullock and buffalo are the hourly companions of humanity, and the cow is worshipped; though the bull is sacred to Siva, and the monkey to Hanuman; though the squirrel bears the marks of the caress of Sri Ramachandra.) But our dull pulpiteer is deadly serious. He believes every word of this fantastic string of lies—believes, that is to say, with the narrow, fierce passion of the ignorant bigot, not with the reasonable and informed conviction of the man of broad mind and open heart.

This view of the Indian people is, as Mr. Ruskin says, *indicated* by Indian art. It is not necessary, according to his practice, to go to a country in order to get to know it: indeed, contact with a people might have disquieting effects on one's notions: if the people do not conform to our idea of them (*indicated* by the arts practised by a "microscopic minority" of the people), clearly they

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

ought to. The usual fate, however, overtakes Mr. Ruskin as overtakes all who enter the left hand of the "Two Paths," the path of emotional prejudice instead of the path of illuminated reason: he walks straight into self-contradiction: he advises his students not to study Norman architecture in Northumberland, but in Normandy—excellent advice, comparable to the advice (which he neither gave nor acted upon) of not studying the Indian people in South Kensington, but in India; or at least on *full* evidence from Indian sources, and without the obscuration of passion worked up from a single event that may have as much proportionate relationship to truth as the dark line in the spectrum has to light.

Mr. Ruskin's view of Indian art is as fallacious as his view of the Indian people of his day or any day. The superb stone elephants and bulls of Mahabalipuram smile at Mr. Ruskin's statement that Indian art, if it "represents any living creature," represents it "under some distorted and monstrous form."

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Its "fragments of colour and flowings of line" are "meaningless"—that is to say, meaningless to Mr. Ruskin, and, therefore, in his quaint logic, meaningless altogether. What he cannot see is obviously not there.

But indeed the utter incapacity of Mr. Ruskin to enter the holy place of Indian art is exposed in his declaration that Indian art "will not draw a man, but an eight-armed monster." The passion of the bigot runs into the false insinuation to his hearers that Indian art has no examples of normal men. Let the long gallery of sculptured Buddhas, and the cave frescoes of Siva and Parvathi answer. And where "an eight-armed monster" appears, it is not a *man* (nor a woman in the glorious relief sculpture at Mahabalipuram of Devi Durga the many-armed overcoming a demon) but a personification in human form of *super-human beings*, their superiority to humanity being symbolised in a numerical extension of the organs of human activity. Certainly in such personifications we have a divergence from "natural fact," as the being in

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Yeats' play, "The Green Helmet," who allowed his head to be cut off, and then walked away with it under his arm, is a divergence from natural fact; but the æsthetic consciousness of humanity has gone beyond the restriction of art to the representation or interpretation of natural facts only. Imagination claims its place, and declares that monstrosity does not consist simply in divergence from nature's present anatomical convention of two arms, but in unfaithfulness to the idea that is intended to be expressed. To set out what is intended to give the impression of being an argument based on fact and proceeding by reason, but is really based on false notions arising out of a partisan emotion, is a far graver artistic offence than putting any number of arms on a figure; for the one, while it may be couched in the finest style of language, is false at the core; but the other stands for a truth though its embodiments may be superficially untrue to "natural fact." But before indicating the unfortunate influence of Mr. Ruskin's

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

emotional partisanship on his general criticism and exposition apart from his disastrous Indian references, I shall quote from another art-critic a different view of oriental art, including Indian.

Oscar Wilde in his essay on "The Decay of Lying" (included in his book called "Intentions,") speaking of the decorative arts, says:

> The whole history of these arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual representation of any object in nature—and our own imitative spirit. Wherever the former has been paramount .....we have had beautiful and imaginative work in which the visible things of life are transmuted into artistic conventions, and the things that life has not, are invented and fashioned for her delight. But wherever we have returned to Life and Nature, our work has always become vulgar, common and uninteresting. Modern tapestry with...its faithful and laborious realism has no beauty whatever. The pictorial glass of Germany is absolutely detestable. We are beginning to weave possible carpets in England, but only because we have returned to the method and spirit of the East.

I can imagine Mr. Ruskin murmuring (in view of the tragic end of Wilde), "An excellent example of the deteriorative

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

power of conventional art ;" but I knew in my youth a man prominent in politics and evangelical Christianity who was so devoted to flowers ("facts of nature") that he was never seen without a buttonhole. His end was the same as Wilde's, but I do not purpose following Mr. Ruskin's method by propounding a theory of the deteriorative power of a love of flowers.

I have undertaken this refutation of Mr. Ruskin's charges against Indian art and the Indian race in the presence of a new expression of that race's art that laughs at the blind dogma of the Victorian critic; and a growing doubt as to whether the whipping of dead horses is a useful occupation, resolves itself into the conviction that, while it may serve little purpose as far as the dead horse is concerned, it may act as a warning to Indian criticism itself, and indicate a saner method than that of Mr. Ruskin in this unfortunate phase. I have already expressed the conviction that the Renaissance in India needs a frank and intelligent literary and art criticism; a criticism that frees

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

itself as far as possible from personal prejudice, that applies impersonal principles, and that is not less concerned with sympathetic exposition than with the pointing out of errors. I have myself ventured to do something in this direction in the chapter of this book on "The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu." I am well aware that it is a risky matter to mix five per cent. of criticism with praise when the criticism concerns one side of a complex personality, that on another side is beloved of the Indian public as a champion of liberty. There is an unspoken feeling (which is based on a psychological truth) that criticism aimed at one phase of a person's life rebounds against other phases; that a flaw in one's poetry has reflections and echoes all round the circumference of one's activities. But this feeling must be got over if we are to have any real advance in the arts.

I remember well one of my earliest lessons in this respect. It was the habit of us youngsters of the Irish Renaissance to resent fiercely the slightest hint of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

doubt that our great god Yeats was not perfect in every comma of his poetry, and to consign the expresser of such a hint to a very sultry literary perdition. On one occasion a new graduate (in all the conceit of his B.A. as we decided) actually published a criticism of Yeats! We fumed. A few days later the "movement" was meeting somewhere, and we were all there. Yeats came in, and I saw an unfamiliar figure being introduced to him. I heard Yeats, as he shook the new-comer's hand warmly in welcome, say, "So this is my critic;" and the "hymn of hate" which I might have sung in my heart was choked by a vivid realisation of the true attitude to true criticism—welcome as a comrade, but on equal terms, and therefore subject itself to criticism.

The quality requisite to both criticism and criticism of criticism is principle, not personality. Where personality and its prejudices intrude, judgment is distorted by emotion, and the result is a grave injustice not only to the subject of the criticism but to the critic. Mr. Ruskin's lecture on

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

"The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art" is itself a warning as to the deteriorative power of personality in criticism—religious and racial personality as well as personal personality. I may be wrong in thinking that Mr. Ruskin built his thesis on an emotion springing out of the Indian Mutiny. If this, however, is true, it is understandable, though none the less reprehensible, and forms only a passing cloud across his criticism of art in general. But if my suspicion is not true, and if the matters which I shall now indicate, are not the result of a passing emotion, but part of the fixed mental attitude of Mr. Ruskin, then I am afraid his critical method, instead of furnishing an illuminating and helpful model for the criticism of the Renaissance in India, will take its place here and elsewhere among the museum examples of how not to criticise.

After satisfactorily consigning Indian art and the Indian race to Hell, Mr. Ruskin proceeds to do the same with one aspect of Gothic art. He tells his audience of students that he is going to

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

bring two specimens before them, and *they* (the students) are to *decide for themselves* as to which of the specimens has the seed of life in it, and which the sign of death. And this is how he proceeds to get an impartial and free judgment from the jury of students:

The first, *that which has within it the sign of death* &c.

The phrase which I have italicised exposes the hypocrisy of his "impanelled jury," for while pretending that he is going to lay before them two specimens on which they are to *decide for themselves*, he imparts to them his own prejudice in his first sentence: he orates like any feed lawyer, and sets out the judgment which the jury is to find.

Something might be said for this rhetorical device were the statement of the case itself flawless. Let us see if it is. The Gothic specimen with the "sign of death" in it is an *angel* from an eighth century psalter in the library of St. John's College, Cambridge. Says Mr. Ruskin:

Now, you see the characteristics of this utterly dead school are, first the wilful closing of its eyes to natural facts; for,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

however ignorant a person may be, he need only look at a human being to see that it has a mouth as well as eyes; and, secondly, the endeavour to adorn or idealise natural fact according to its own notions: it puts red spots in the middle of the hands, and sharpens the thumbs, thinking to improve them. Here you have the most pure type possible of the principles of idealism in all ages: whenever people don't look at nature, they always think they can improve her.

Remember, this deadly specimen of "the hopeless work of all ages" is an *angel*, part of the *decoration*, not *illustration*, of a book of sacred songs. Yet Mr. Ruskin deals with it as if it should be a photograph; nay, he deals with a decorative design, based on the supposed approximation of angel to human form, as if it should be a photograph of a *human being*. He accuses the designer of ignoring nature, when, in fact, the designer is looking through nature to super-nature (at any rate to what was supposed to be super-nature), and indicating a quality of design based on the circumstance that there are such things as hands, and that they have four fingers and a thumb. This very observation of natural fact should have prevented Mr. Ruskin's fixing his eyes on the sharpening of the thumbs

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and concluding therefrom that the designer wilfully closed his eyes to natural facts. There are four arguments on each hand, in the spatulate finger-tips, in favour of observation of nature against the two arguments of the sharpened thumbs. Mr. Ruskin is out-voted by a majority of eight in ten. He accuses the designer of the angel, and all his school, of the offence of obedience to mathematical law, (in a *design* whose main purpose is to express qualities or ideas through the mathematical relationships of forms), and condemns him to artistic death because he does not swear obedience to the arithmetic of anatomy and physiology with which *design* has only a very general, not at all a particular, relationship. If Mr. Ruskin had flung out all such art on the straight plea that he detested it, and could only tolerate accurately painted representations, or interpretations, of things seen, we could have no objection: it would simply mark his personal limitation. But when he begins to make a law of his prejudice

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and to stretch the limitation of himself and South Kensington from pole to pole, retrospectively and prospectively, he leaves the unfortunate impression that his pen is dipped in the blood that comes to the cheek in emotion, not in the grey matter of thought.

Now turn to the example of Gothic are that has "the seed of life" in it, which Mr. Ruskin instructs his audience to *see* as a preliminary to their own independent judgment; a sculptured sketch of "The Serpent Beguiling Eve" done between the eighth and twelfth century in Northern Italy.

Observe, the workman's whole aim is straight at the facts, as well as he can get them; and not merely at the facts, but at the very heart of the facts. A common workman might have looked at nature for his serpent, but he would have thought only of its scales. But this fellow does not want scales, nor coils; he can do without them; he wants the serpent's heart—malice and insinuation; and he has actually got them to some extent. So also a common workman, even in this barbarous stage of art, might have carved Eve's arms and body better; but this man does not care about arms and body, if he can only get at Eve's mind—show that she is pleased at being flattered, and yet in a state of uncomfortable hesitation.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

"Fact" is the excellence of this specimen of *living* Gothic art, as alleged ignoring and improving of natural fact was the defect in the specimen of *dead* Gothic art. But when we look for the *facts* we find they are not at all the facts of physiology and structure (of accuracy as to mouth and thumbs, of the oval shape of the face and the position of the iris under the upper lid of the eye, in contrast with the *angel's* circular face and centred iris), on which Mr. Ruskin has just insisted: the facts have become *emotions*—malice and insinuation in the serpent, and flattery and hesitation in the woman.

And what of this shifting of the ground of fact? Does it leave the facts any more clear and certain? Shall we find in the serpent kingdom one member of that kingdom that knows the emotion of malice? Shall we discover outside mythology a woman who would eat apples at the flattering suggestion of a talking serpent? Truth to nature, that Mr. Ruskin demanded from the angel, is surely

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

just as incumbent upon the serpent and the woman; more so, indeed, since the serpent and the woman belong to the visible and actual world, while the angel belongs to the super-sensible. We cannot say for certain that angels have *not* sharp thumbs and circular eyes, but we do know for certain that serpents are not gifted with human speech, nor women with the faculty of interpreting serpent language.

So much for the "facts." What is behind this twisting of argument is the simple truth that Mr. Ruskin was only capable of responding to a very plain representation of human emotion and natural phenomena in art. Mysticism and symbolism eluded him. Truth, which he insists on as the basis of art, was the little truth that he himself was capable of apprehending. Anything else disturbed him, and sent him on to a rostrum to rant. A masterpiece of impressionism by Whistler appeared to Ruskin to be only "a pot of paint flung in the face of the public." Whistler was able to take a libel action

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

against his bigoted critic. If a suit could be filed on behalf of the designer of the angel, it would be for defamation arising out of misrepresentation and dishonest argument. The carver of the serpent, according to Mr. Ruskin, showed himself no common workman because he omitted the serpent's coils and scales: the omission was part of his endeavour to express fact. The designer of the angel, on the contrary, has lost the key to the world ("he has built a cell for himself in which he must abide, barred up for ever—there is no more hope for him than for a sponge or a madrepore") because he has omitted to provide his angel with a mouth —though, for the purpose of expression, as one can see at a glance at the two woodcuts in Mr. Ruskin's lecture, the mouth is no more necessary than the scales.

Indeed, one is moved to see in the expanded eyes of the angel a look of gentle and pained surprise that a dear, good man like Mr. Ruskin should put prejudice in the place of imagination; and in the extended palms an injunction to the future

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

critics of the Renaissance in India to resist the temptation to renounce the duty of balanced thought in favour of a hectic emotion. At which salutary point we may leave the matter.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

LITERARY IDEALS

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

LITERARY IDEALS

"For all I know," Yeats wrote in his introduction to the first English edition of *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore, "so abundant and simple is this poetry, the new Renaissance has been born in your country and I shall never know it except by hearsay."

Hearsay to an individual of Yeats' great mental sensitiveness is not a matter of great deprivation. It might even prove a source of added pleasure derived from translation, by adding the heightening effect of the unknown to the known. But hearsay is not quite so acceptable to the majority of those very valuable persons whose purely spectacular interest in literature and the arts provides the audience that publishers (and artists too, though they do not always care to admit it) find useful. With them hearsay may prove a barrier to appreciation. We have seen how hearsay, working through

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

prejudice, turned John Ruskin's judgment in art into hysterics when he looked toward India. Even in the works of the Bengal painters, where one would think that Indian and European eyes were on an equal level, looking at the same thing, there is an element of interpretation necessary. The artists' script may be readable to both, but it is certainly not equally intelligible to both.

But in literature the element of hearsay is somewhat larger and more complicated. Translation from speech to speech, unfamiliar metaphor and thought, and a whole world of difference in idea and outlook, make anything approaching full *literary* understanding and enjoyment impossible. Transference of technical beauties of verse or prose from one language to another can only be about as successful as an attempt to convey the music of the vina through the pianoforte—not to mention the vulgar European baby harmonium which is ruining Indian voices and coarsening

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Indian ears, and holding back music from playing its full part in the Renaissance.

The link between the literature of one race and that of another is, therefore, mainly formed of the *stuff* that may be communicated through the mental organism, and may be appreciated for its significance, scarcely at all for its own expression. That *stuff* will be compounded of two main substances, the ideal and the philosophy out of which the literary expression has grown; and any true appreciation of the work of the writers of the Renaissance in India (who, like their great predecessors, and their great living Master, Rabindranath, write in their own Indian languages), must be based on a sympathetic understanding of such ideal and philosophy. In the case of the Western reader there is also required a considerable revision of current notions as to the nature of ideals in creative literature, and as to the relationship of philosophy and literature.

Most people think of *ideals* as something elevated and distant to work up to,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

but the ideals of the makers of true literature—and I now limit my thoughts to the poets—are never ahead of, or outside themselves. The life of their immediate surroundings, the history and the natural scenery of their land, its imaginative background, and the translation of all these things through literary expression, will put certain bounds to the matter with which the poets shall deal, and the way in which they shall deal with it; but the incalculable power in literature which we call originality is not a *product* of these things: it springs from the centre of the poet's nature, and uses the materials it finds at hand. The poet, as Shelley so gloriously sings in "Adonais," does not become immortal through his poetry, but writes immortally because he is already one of the immortals. We would be doing as sensibly in taking an ear to pieces in order to find hearing, as in trying to find Shelley in a dissection of the plot, scenery, characters and language of "Prometheus Unbound." Where we *may* glimpse a flying trace of the immortal

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

spirit that has given to words a life that will endure beyond dynasties and empires, is in the characteristic outlook and temper that we come to recognise as peculiarly Shelleyan—a search for the spiritual essences of things, and a burning revolt against oppression in any form. These were the master-passions of his soul: his poems were, so to speak, crumbs dropped from the mystic table at which he sought to appease his hunger. We may, therefore, speak of *freedom* as a literary ideal of Western poetry, found in Shelley's works, but we must bear in mind the important fact that his ideal *came with him* through the gates of birth: it was not an outside affair that he took up, as one might take up a subject for an essay.

That is the first and probably also the last thought should be impressed upon those young Indians who have felt or will feel the urge to expression in poetry that comes through the new birth of the renascent spirit. "Be yourselves first: do not fall under the illusory notion that

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

you are fulfilling your ideal in desiring to write as good blank verse as Tennyson, or as fine lyrics as Swinburne. You will never sing your own song if you are content to echo another's: four lines struck from the *vina* of your own heart experience or mental illumination will be worth infinitely more to you and the world than reams of mimicry."

What I have said bears chiefly upon that personal type of poetry which is called lyrical. But the same thing holds good in poetry that deals with subjects outside the poet's own experience. They can have no life other than that which the poet gives them though the life that he gives them may be greater, and come from deeper sources, than his own span of years. When Meredith sings of "The Lark Ascending," it does not matter whether the lark ascends or not: to those who have not heard the miracle of that song that begins when the wing leaves the ground and never ceases till it touches it again, such a poem, apart from that interfusion of the poet which I am trying to

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

indicate, would be "words, words, words." But it is more than words: it is a living joy, not because a lark sings and soars, but because the poet soars into the blue amplitudes of his imagination and carries us with him. The lark would be mightily surprised if it could learn all the things that Shelley and Meredith, and Watson and Le Gallienne have written about it, that never entered into its head. The truth is that the necessity to soar was in the poets themselves, awaiting an artistic excuse to rise from the earth. If the lark had not provided it, something else would.

But the fact that poetry precedes its ideals, just as life precedes biology, and the stars precede astronomy, need not prevent our seeking to understand the processes whereby the thoughts and feelings of the poet are given expression, and how the differences in such expression arise. In the West those differences are very clearly marked, and the poets themselves are not slow to talk about them. It was only the War that stopped Signor Marinetti, the Italian futurist

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

poet, from talking on every platform in Europe about what he and his school considered to be fitting matters for modern poets to write about, and how they should write about them; and my memory has pleasant spaces in which I participated in much disquisition during fifteen years of my life in Ireland with poets who have now attained a worldwide reputation, such as Yeats, Æ, or the more recent James Stephens.

In all such discussion of literary ideals in the West, I have always, save amongst the Irish poets, felt a lack of a convincing knowledge of the constitution of the poet, and therefore of poetry; and this lack has led to a pettiness and want of consequence in the new movements in poetry, and in the criticism which comes in their wake, against which the poets of the Renaissance in India should be warned. An instance of this came particularly under my own observation. A new book of poetry was reviewed in one of the London daily newspapers which used to have a reputation for balanced and helpful criticism, but is now

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

run by young men whose chief aim seems to be the turning of phrases, and the bandying of echoes from books. The conclusion of the reviewer with regard to the book I refer to was that, "upon the foundation of his stimulus to sing, he (the author) has upreared a fabric of mystic pantheism, which, consciously thought and expressed, ruins his poetry."

Now here we have set out one of the literary ideals of the West, namely, that a consciously expressed view of the universe is ruinous to poetry. This is not the reviewer's own dogma : he picked it up in the course of his journey from Oxford to Fleet Street, and never found time to measure its truth by the poetry of Spenser, or Shelley, or Wordsworth, or Tennyson, not to mention Milton and Dante, and the poets in colour and tone like Leonardo da Vinci and Richard Wagner, all of whom had pronounced and sometimes heterodox views of the universe, and consciously thought and expressed them.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

It is quite obvious in the book I am speaking of that the author views life and its phenomena from a standpoint which may be called pantheistic : further it is evident that he is a believer in reincarnation ; but it is equally obvious that certain English poets believe in a God apart from his universe, and in eternal life after this present span on earth ; and that certain others do *not* believe in a God or a future life. If a poet believes in anything, indeed, if he believes in nothing, it is bound to show itself in his poetry. The ruling of this particular critic seems to be that the lamentations of Western poetry over a lost life, on the current assumption that this is the only life, are poetry—that is, granting that they are musically and beautifully expressed—while a joyful reading of life in the light of a succession of lives, because it is not the automatic general view (and consequently appears as an unfamiliar and disturbing element to the critic) ruins the poetry. If you sing songs about " the lust of the flesh, the lust of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the eye, and the pride of life," you may succeed in writing *poetry*: if you apprehend a subtler body than the physical, if you touch vision that is deeper than sight, if you catch a glimpse of a life that beggars this with its splendour, and if you say so, you are committing—*philosophy*, and that is abhorrent to the literary ideals of the school to which I am referring.

It is here, I think, that we find the vital distinction between the literary deals of East and West. The predominant activity in Europe is analysis, separation, specialisation, not merely in the affairs of daily life, but in the things of the mental life. A poet is a poet, and a philosopher is a philosopher; and if a poet embarks on the business of philosophy he is frowned upon as if he had outraged some principle of trades-unionism. But that is only a surface distinction: the real root of the matter is in the great gap that has been made between what is regarded as life and religion or philosophy. In the Middle Ages literature and the arts were preserved by

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the religious bodies. Later on, the creative artists revolted against the domination of the Church. The revolt was encouraged by the rise of rationalistic thought, and now it has reached the extreme in the denial of any connection between the artist and the philosopher. It is held to be the work of the artist to deal with life as he finds it, not with "theories" of it; a very excellent rule, if one could lose sight of the fact that theorising about life is itself one of life's activities, and that "in singers' selves" may be found "theme for song," as William Watson sings.

Such a divorce between the arts and religion and philosophy is the natural development of the individualistic and materialistic character of European thought, and particularly of religious thought. The exclusion of the idea of re-birth from Christian theology in the fourth century was a long step towards the separation of religion and life, for it put the entire absolute power of religion in the hands of a close body of interpreters,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and took away from the general run of humanity a direct knowledge of the truths regarding the inner nature of man, which religion once possessed and afterwards lost, and which are being re-discovered by science. Heaven and Hell were put at cosmic distances from life, notwithstanding the reincarnationist truth declared by Jesus Christ that "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you." The use of interior powers of humanity for the healing of disease and the contacting of beings and realms beyond the ordinary senses was lost to the people and also to the priesthood. And so it came about that while "Freedom slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent," the vision of the artist slowly narrowed down from denial to denial, until it is now limited to the senses, the emotions and a few crudities of the lower mind; and the whole vast and glorious region of the Divine World, that is open to many, that is a fact in Indian thought, is relegated by western art canons to superstition, or, at best, speculation.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

In India, it appears to me, there has been no such separation made between the various functions of humanity. In the West we have a proverb that you cannot whistle and chew meal; but in the East I have seen a poet whistle a song of the Lord, and at the same time chew the profoundest of philosophical concepts with the ease and enjoyment of betel. This was one of the first surprises I got on coming to India, for I must confess that, although I did not agree with the criticism of the book of poetical "ruins" to which I have referred, and knew facts regarding the realm called "supernatural" that would have made the critic's hair stand on end, I was influenced by the repetition of the idea that art has nothing to do with such things, into a vague fear that the critic might be right. India, however, gave me the complete confidence that is necessary to literary creation. She showed me the examples of Mirabai and Tukaram and Rabindranath Tagore, in whom life, religion and philosophy are one, and sing themselves in the poetry of spiritual joy.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

And besides these greater names there are numerous poets of local fame whose lives and works are a contradiction of the western idea that philosophy robs poetry of feeling, the one being of the head, the other of the heart. To the person to whom philosophy means Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and dull dissertations on abstract theories, the detachment of heart and head may appear a quite reasonable process. It is the natural outcome of the banishment of philosophy from life into the dusty region of the academic.

But the names of the German gentlemen mentioned, or even of their brighter brother of France, M. Bergson, or the subtle Irish Bishop, Berkeley, who discovered the paradox of psychology, that when we look at a thing we are not really looking at it, do not exhaust philosophy. They themselves knew from what archaic sources beyond Europe their philosophisings filtered down to them; but the tens of thousands who read cheap reprints of their works, including modern poets and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

critics, are in blank ignorance as to the vast original philosophies of India, that took their rise in ages past, yet are to-day the mainsprings of the national life; and in equally blank ignorance of the long line of philosopher poets to whom their philosophy was so much a thing of life, so exalted by the joy of discovery and experience, so vitalised by emotion, that it was the most natural thing in the world for them to express in poetry the thoughts that to them were charged with feeling, and the feelings that to them were made coherent by thought.

There is, indeed, a little poem by Appar, an early seventh century saint of the Cuddalore district in South India, that expresses the true relationship of thought and feeling, and their mutual service in the evocation of the deeper nature, under a homely figure that would have rejoiced the heart of Wordsworth or some of the poets of the modern Irish school. Seldom has the human imagination bridged in one stride so wide a gulf as that between a cottage churn and the final

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

mystery of the spirit. To the young man of Fleet Street it is probably a consciously thought and expressed piece of philosophy, and ruins the poetry. To the old young man of Cuddalore it was a living verity whose realisation was the cause of the poetry. I have ventured to transcribe it thus as to meaning, but the music of its original Tamil remains untranslated:

O ye whose feet all Godward run,
Pause, for the Ever-shining One
Comes not for drum or scented silk:
He hides as *ghi* within the milk,
Essence enfolded, unexpressed.
Would you behold him manifest?
Gather your eyes from quests above.
Take you the churning-rod of Love.
Wrap round its upright stem the tense
Two-ended cord, Intelligence.
Pull! and for Wisdom loving-eyed,
And Love in Wisdom purified,
Unto your eyes, made clear by grace,
He shall unveil His Shining Face.

The poetical work of these saintly singers ranges from the esotericism of S. Manickavachakar to the realism of S. Pattinaththar, yet through all the variety there is the one urge towards

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

identification with the Godhead. But their aspiration was not, as so much modern religious aspiration is, a one-day-in-seven institution. S. Thiruvalluvar, a Mylapore saint of the first century, links up agriculture and the Beatific Vision, emphasises the inefficacy of mere ceremonial, and anticipates by nearly two millennia the Scottish bard's declaration, "A man's a man for a' that."

Take the special point of the attitude to death. In the West, death overshadows everything. The only solace is in faith. A vague hope based on a habit of religious sentiment may be permitted by literary criticism to show itself in the arts, but a clear knowledge of the facts of psychical research would "ruin" poetry. Here in India, however, it is like Swinburne's "Garden of Proserpine" where,

> As a God self-slain on his own high altar
> Death lies dead.

Indian artists do not deny decay, but they see in it a condition of renewal: they do not deny the phenomenon of dying, but they consider it a phase of life.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

This alters the whole value of things, and it is the inability of western critics to follow the subtle ramifications of this fact that muddles them when they approach Indian poetry, as a writer in the same newspaper as that to which I have already referred was muddled in the presence of Tagore's poetry, and more particularly muddles them when they find the same outlook on life—which they will more frequently find in future—appearing in western poetry.

The contrast can be seen if we read any one of Tagore's poems that sing of death, and then read such a song of the passing of things as was sung by a promising young English poet, Rupert Brooke, who died in 1915 at the Dardanelles.

I have been so great a lover, filled my days
So proudly with the splendours of love's praise,
The pain, the calm and the astonishment,
Desire illimitable, and still content,
And all dear names men use to cheat despair,
For the perplexed and viewless streams that bear
Our hearts at random down the dark of life.
Now ere the unthinking silence on that strife
Steals down, I would cheat drowsy Death so far
My night shall be remembered for a star
That outshone all the suns of all men's days.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

The poet then proceeds to "cheat Death" by cataloguing, most musically, the various things in life that had his affection; none of them gives any clear affirmation of the essential Divinity of humanity, and all are at or below the level of æsthetic sensuality.

A peasant in Ireland once told me a story of a fairy mound. It was robbed of its stones by a greedy and irreverent man for the building of a house. The first night he slept in the new house he was awakened at midnight by hammers, hundreds of them, hammering on the stones. It was the fairies uttering their protest. Two of them carried on a conversation close to his ear, from which he learned their opinion that it was an evil thing to harness immortal powers to mortal selfishness, and that the only sure structure was that whose materials were built into a spiritual plan and on a spiritual foundation.

I did not enquire about the facts of the story. It was quite enough for me that it was true—true of house-building, and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

true of the building of the hidden edifice of the imagination which may either be the dungeon of the builder, or a palace of crystal like that which the Celtic God of Love made for a Goddess, open to the heavens for Divine traffic. It is this quality of spiritual vision that seems to me to be the supreme characteristic of Indian poetry. I know little of its verbal technique beyond the simple appeal of sound; but there is an element of symmetry in idea and emotion in Indian poetry that comes even through translation from folk-ballads and the products of culture alike.

A song to Sri Krishna by Mirabai, sung in the sixteenth century, will serve as an example of this symmetry.*

Here in my courtyard where the breeze
Comes odoured from the champak trees,
And high in blue, unclouded calm
Stands waitingly the fruited palm,
Come, little one, at cool of day
And on your flute soft music play.

* *These and other renderings of Indian poems will be found in "The Garland of Life." See notice at the end of this book.*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Oh! fresh as music-haunted wind,
Come, thou enchanter of my mind.
Lift up your ageless infant glance,
And in my heart's cool courtyard dance
The joy that foots the years along
Till all my being break in song.

Dance, holy child. My melody
Shall sing our joy, who only see
Heaven's courtyard here on earthly ground,
And hear a music past our sound,
And know in every joy and woe
God's onward footsteps dancing go.

To anyone who knows the original of this song, which I have called "The Holy Dance," it will be apparent that my lines are not a translation, but a paraphrase. I am convinced that, if Indian poetry is to be a living influence in the English-speaking world—and I sincerely hope it will, for God knows it is needed—the way toward such influence must be by the living thing in the poetry. It is this living thing that I have tried to capture, and I have not scrupled in other paraphrases to forget the length of line or rhyme scheme where I felt incapable of assimilating them.

The difficulty in respect of anything like "translation" is very considerable.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

The highly inflected languages of India are capable of a much greater content of meaning than the analytical English. A line in Sanskrit may require a line twice its length in English. Line for line translation is therefore artistically impossible. At the same time there will be found many poems in the Indian languages which may be put into an almost identical English form, and thus add to their spiritual and figurative beauty some charm of the technical skill of the poet. I shall take as a specimen another poem by Mirabai, in which she sings of having purchased the realisation of God. Literally it runs :

Mother, I have got Govinda, and paid for him.
Some say he is light.
Some say he is heavy.
But I had him weighed in a balance.

Mother, I have got Govinda and paid for him.
Some say he is cheap,
Some say he is dear.
Some say he cannot be valued.

Mother, I have got Govinda and paid for him.
In Brindaban
In the central square
I have bought him after beating the drum.
Mother, I have got Govinda and paid for him.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Mira's lord is Krishna,
The bearer of the mountain.
These things are due to past lives.

Here is the first verse put into phonetics that shows the structure of the poem:

Mai maine Govinda leenho mole.
Koi kahe halaka.
Koi kahe Bhari.
Leeyo hai taroju tole.

And this is my attempt to reproduce the structure.

I have bought the Herdsman who guards my soul.
He is light, some state;
Some, heavy his weight.
I know, who have purchased the whole.
I have bought Govinda, and mine he is made.
He is cheap, some fear;
And some, he is dear.
I know, for the price I have paid.
I have bought the Lord, and I wear his sign.
With smiling Face
In the market-place
At the beat of my drum he was mine.
I have gazed on the Hidden One eye to eye;
And the price I told
In his palm was gold
I gathered in lives gone bye.

I believe that, so far as the giving of Indian poetry to the outside world is concerned, it is this method that will

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

commend itself to those who are likely to value Indian poetry; and I believe this rule should apply not only to "translations" of the lyrical treasures of the past, whose magnitude and beauty are overwhelming, but also to the poetry of the present. I am not going to preach exclusiveness. Art has no bounds. I am willing to let the very young English poets sing their little passions in imitation of their brethren late of Brussels and Liege, provided they sing them artistically—which is not usual. But if the circumference of art is everywhere, its centre is *here*, not in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, or Pope's *Essay on Man*, or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which seem to lie like nightmares on the literary chests of young—and, I regret to say, a few grown-up—Indians who are so prodigal of energy and so niggard of commonsense as to enter into competition with poets to whom English was their mother-tongue. These Indian poets cannot add to *English* literature, for they are not English. Neither can they carry on the glorious tradition of *Indian* liter-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

ature in a foreign tongue, the example of Devi Sarojini notwithstanding. Tagore thinks and composes in Bengali, not because of perversity, but because it is the *artistic* thing for a Bengali to do. It is because he has lived in the language and natural symbolism of Bengal—because, to speak in the terminology of your great fundamental philosophy, he has provoked no obstruction by the *tamas* in his body, by thwarting its nature—that he has found a responsive instrument for the music of his *rajas*, his emotions and thoughts, and through them, has let into the world a new infusion of the Eternal Spirit, the *Sat* of *sat* of himself and the universe.

But if, in spite of these considerations, some young Indians are impelled to express themselves in poetry in the English language, I would beg of them to avoid the thing called Anglo-Indian poetry. It is no more theirs than pure English poetry, and it is far more dangerous. They may try their *sitar* with English poetry—and fail, and in the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

failing may learn a valuable lesson; but they may try it with Anglo-English poetry—and succeed, and in succeeding, achieve a useless mediocrity.

If they *must* write in English, let it be in the English *language only*: let them keep themselves unspotted of its point of view, its temperament, its mannerisms; for their repetitions of these will fail of conviction, which is one of the absolute essentials of art, since they can never disguise the fact that they are imitations, and Nature abhors imitation more that she does a vacuum: there is a chance of filling a vacuum, but none of turning an imitation into an original.

I do not know in what way young Indian writers will carry out this injunction; and I am not sure if to the impertinence of preaching to them I should not add the scattering of the ashes of guilt on my own head, seeing that I, an Irishman, myself write in English. It happens, however, that I, and those with whom I have been associated in the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

revival of literature and the drama in Ireland, have had several generations of English-speaking ancestors, and have had English as our, so to speak, mother-in-law tongue, as the result of what our education bureaucracy ironically called National Education.

And yet, we have created a new English. Yeats, twenty years ago, felt the necessity for an Irish-English speech both in prose and poetry, and his influence in that direction became a discernible element which was labelled "the Celtic note." Synge carried the process to its extreme in a highly concentrated stage-speech that was as much related to the actual speech of the Irish peasantry from whom he copied it, as a string of Irish bulls would be. Others transcribed the dialects of their provinces, and produced a strongly idiomatic speech. Others again were content to people their imaginations with the great figures of mythology, and the heroes of legend and history, and to let these work their subtle will on thought and speech; and all kept

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

themselves as far as possible from the "eftsoons" and "methinks" style of English poetry, and as near as possible to their own spiritual and emotional centre, which was also Ireland's, the result being a body of literature which can be classed as Hiberno-Anglian: Irish-English, not Anglo-Irish.

Which brings this digression back to its starting-point with, I trust, some illumination for the claim I would make upon those who will be the poets of India's future, that, if they are compelled to an alternative to writing in their mother-tongue, let it be, not Anglo-Indian, but Indo-Anglian, Indian in spirit, Indian in thought, Indian in emotion, Indian in imagery, and English only in words, as we shall see in another chapter is the case with the bulk of the poetry of Sarojini Naidu. Let their ideal be the expression of themselves, but they must be quite sure that it *is* their *self*, not merely faint echoes and shadows from others or from the transient phases of desire.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

The way to the universal is not along the surface of the earth of life, but by the strait gate and narrow way of one's own deeper life. The more intensely themselves Indian writers are, the more intensely Indian they will be ; and the more intensely Indian they are the most certainly they will fill their place as a string on the vina of the Divine Player at whose finger-tips tremble the raga and the ragini of the wandering forth and the home-coming of the worlds. Let them not be led away by talk of modernity and cosmopolitanism: poetry has nothing to do with ancient or modern, but only with *now*, and the true cosmopolitanism will not be achieved through the ignoring of nationality but through its fulfilment.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

In the preceding chapter I discussed the matter of the *ideal* in literature which is one element in the *stuff* (rather than the purely literary quality) that forms the link between the literatures of different races. I also glanced in passing at the fusion of the other element, philosophy, with poetry in the songs of Indian philosopher-poets. I now propose to disclose, as far as I am able, the relationship of poetry and philosophy, from the point of view of Indian psychology, using general instead of technical terms. The views that I shall enunciate are all, of course, deduced, for the great artists in literature, East or West, did not philosophise on poetry or poetise on philosophy. In India they sang—and still sing—of realisation of the Divine. But their realisation was no vaporous emotion : it was the culmination of physical, emotional, and mental experience, guided by tested practice, and based on a fuller

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

view of human faculty and possibility than we have yet evolved in the West.

Let us, then, consider that view.

From the earliest time of which we have record or hint, it has been a habit of the human consciousness to formulate within itself some conception of the universe of which it found itself a part, and of its own relationship thereto. Such conception it has also been a habit of the human consciousness to throw into expression, for the purpose of exchange, confirmation or correction. The very urge to formulation within, drives also to formulation without, and in the outward region the impact of multiplicity annuls the possibility of that which is finite in conception being mistaken except by the unthoughtful as infinite in presentation. For this reason the impression and its expression, with their mutual reaction thrown backward and forward, making perpetual modification in one another yet both being the dual operation of one power, are figured in ancient symbolism as twin serpents, mutually destroying yet nourishing one

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

another, and Hermes (Mercury) the bearer of the twin serpents was regarded as the guardian divinity of the seers on the one hand, and of the artists on the other; and therefore as the foe of those who would withhold from religion and philosophy the comradeship of beauty, or deny to the arts the fecundation and inspiration of the Soul.

Between religion and philosophy in their essence, and the arts, there is not only a historical coincidence in time, but an inevitable co-operation, which, being essential and integral, should disclose itself in related laws and activities in religious and philosophical formulations, in their human channels and exponents, and in their expression in the arts. Let us see if this is so.

In the interactions of human activity, the first contact is between surfaces. Our existence on the physical level of the universe is possible only through our physical instruments, and their subtle affinities. Our peripheral nerves inform us only of the peripheral universe. A

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

step further, and we have fallen through the physical and sensible to the conceptual. We apprehend behind and beneath the superficial, something intangible. We admire (or not, as the case may be,) the round face of the girl of Rouen, or the almond eyes of the East; but we cannot put the *shape* of either in a bottle in a laboratory.

To these two aspects, which we may term the *body of appearance* and the *body of form*, we have to add the *body of desire*, the spring of all activity, the secret of evil—and of good. Lacking the movement of desire to and from the objects of desire, form would be formless, appearance would dwell in the unapparent. Desire is the urge in the artist towards creation, towards the abysses of imperfection that forever open between conception and execution: it is the link between Divine and human. "Desire, that flung them in the deep, called God, too from his sleep," as the seer-poet, AE puts it.

Deeper still, we apprehend the basis in which these three "bodies" inhere, the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

body of thought—the source of vitality, the centre that is parent of the circumference. "I think, therefore I am," said the philosopher Descartes. Mr. Chesterton having popularised the journalistic pastime of head swallowing tail, it was inevitable that someone should set the old philosopher right by declaring, "I am, therefore I think." Both are right: it is in the nature of *Am*ness to preserve itself by thinking: cease thinking, and you cease *ex*isting. It is also of the nature of thought to seek after existence, amness; and this it does by way of desire into form and appearance.

To these telescoped bodies, or functions, of the human consciousness (speaking only of its general and normal operations) we may relate the great "Square Deific" of the arts. The superficial function of life has its counterpart in painting, which conveys to us explicitly only the *appearance* of things, and only implicitly whatever else the looker behind the eye is capable of seeing. For a portrait we go past the door of the poet; but later

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

he will come into his kingdom. So also we pass the door of the painter for a representation of *form*: he cannot put his brush round a corner: he holds us forever in the front of things, pillories us in the gaze of nature: it is the sculptor who takes us behind things. Still, while the sculptor will make us move as a planet around the magnetic centre of his masterpiece—thus adding to inanimate form the ironical power of making apparently intelligent beings turn on their own axes—his art and the art of the painter are as immobile as the form and appearance which they portray.

But neither of these arts takes us to the heart or mind of things. All that they give us of emotion or thought is reflected from the other arts. To express feeling, we need movement; a sensitive medium that will resonate to the increased vibration of the moment, and return to quiescence. The statement that "music is the language of the emotions" is true, even to the extent of the addendum that it is a universal speech. But it must be borne

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

in mind that "language" will vary according to race and habitat: the music of Europe, and the music of India, are equally the expression of emotion; but there is more of a difference than eighty degrees of longitude and forty of latitude between them: there is all the difference between the throwing of an emotion into expression with a view to its expansion and intensification, as in the West, and the enunciation of an emotion with a view to transmuting it to its octave or its overtones, and so finding escape from it, as in the East.

To express thought, we have to go further still. A drawing, a figure, a tone may serve to carry a rudimentary meaning across the great gulf that *ahamkara* (egoism) has put between soul and soul. But the advance of consciousness through the physical and lower mental degrees has caused a corresponding refinement of speech, which has drawn into it the qualities of painting, sculpture and music, and in its highest expression—poetry—has become an epitome of the arts, both intuiti-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

vely and also consciously, in such work as that of the French poet Stephen Mallarme, who tries to make every stanza convey an image, a thought, a sentiment, and a philosophical symbol.

Thus the vehicle for the expression of conscious thought is found in the literary arts, and our evaluation of the four fundamental arts will depend on our estimate of the value of the thought-function as contrasted with the feeling-function, and on our estimate of the value of the qualities of form and appearance. The result will be temperamental; but apart from this, there are clear limitations, such as the impossibility of teaching, say, the law of causation on a piano.

Yet, observe that here we come across a vivid patch on the warp and woof of conscious life that discloses the to-and-fro flying of the shuttle. It is the arts that in presentation are immobile, painting and sculpture, that compel mobility in the beholder. We cannot see a picture by fixing the eye on one spot. We may

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

see that spot with amazing clearness; but the spot on the inner eye will have no relation to mental vision if unrelated to the rest of the picture. You know little of the agony in Hero's eyes, in Leighton's picture, if you have not looked long at her clenched hands. So, too, with sculpture. The will-o'-the-wisp of Beauty gleams from a thousand angles of invitation. The propped chin of Rodin's *Thinker* in front of the Pantheon in Paris gives intensity: the bent back puts weight into the thought. Every inch of our orbit finds a new revelation of form; and when we have performed its revolution, and called upon the multitude of voices to speak one synthetic word in the mind, we have the consciousness of an incompleteness that might be made complete if we could enjoy the privilege of the birds, and look at the sculpture from above as well as sideways.

On the other hand, it is the mobile arts—music, whose life is an instant's articulate football between silence and silence; literature, with its scant garment

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

for some thought, that it has made of pieces torn from the robes of a thousand flying images—it is these arts that impose immobility and single-pointedness of mind on the hearer. An invitation to an impromptu dance would find little favour with a person who was under the thrall of some mighty piece of music; and however highly we may esteem the simple and obvious in the literature of a moral code, it is beyond possibility that, in creative literature, he who runs, either physically or mentally, may read.

So far we have considered the relationship of the nature of humanity to its expression in the arts, and have seen that the exercise of thought finds its articulation in the literary arts. It is necessary (not by way of discovery save in so far as the obvious may be in danger of secreting itself too close to one's eye) to remark that any coherent presentation of truth finds its proper vehicle of expression in literature, and in that presentation conforms with the quaternary of qualities: appearance in its separate teachings; form

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

in their balanced totality; desire, in their practical outcome in altruistic effort; thought, in the final ratification of the purified reason.

If, however, we shoulder ourselves through the obvious, and enquire which of the phases of literature is that in which we shall find the qualities raised to their highest potency, and therefore calculated to form the most worthy and effective vehicle of expression, we shall hardly be likely to accept the answer, poetry, straightway and finally. The first objection of, say, a student will be the vast libraries of prose writings on philosophy all over the world, with perhaps a subtle thrust at the present pages here set out in prose. The first objection of the lover of poetry will be the appalling notion of joining in unholy matrimony two members of the family of human consciousness, poetry and philosophy, whom some deity of a new Olympus has decreed to be forever kept asunder, aided and abetted in their divorce by the young men to whom I have already referred who

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

review books for the London newspapers, and give a line's *coup de grace* (with little of grace) to any would-be poet who betrays the fact that he or she has an intelligent theory of life and death.

I do not purpose here endeavouring to make a case for the burning of philosophical libraries, or for being myself burnt at the stake of the new literary inquisition. But I cannot resist the temptation in passing to remark that it might be more than fitting if some closer union were established between any system of thought and the eldest of the arts, poetry, even in the matter of propaganda. For what is the Universe but God's exposition of His nature? and what is poetry but the first Upanishat, and the nearest to His secret? When the Spirit of God "brooded" on the face of the waters then was the first act of consciousness, and the primal poem. Then came utterance. "God said," and the cosmic music sounded. Afterwards came the fashioning of the terrestrial sculpture, and the clothing of the form in the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

painter's pigments. Thus the order of the art of Genesis was likewise the order of the genesis of the arts.

Such use of poetry would be no untried innovation, but simply a reversion to the method of the Vedas and the Psalms of David, not to mention the rhymed legal codes and tribal histories of ancient Ireland. The poetical method was, indeed, the prevailing one of the ancient world; as it is still the method of the unsophisticated, in word and gesture, when the operation of the lower mind is intensified by the nobler emotions, and lifted by increased vibration towards the higher degrees of the nature. It was also the natural way to true memory. It was when humanity began to forget, and had to externalise its memory in written records, that the poet stepped from his place at the side of the king, to make way during succeeding centuries for the ever widening system of mental anarchy known as education.

To-day, under the imposition of European ideals over practically the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

entire globe, we are eating the Dead-Sea-fruit of intellectual stagnation, which is the natural fruition of thought unfertilised by the spirit—thought devoid of poetry, with its equally sinister companion, poetry devoid of thought, both crying out for what each can give the other, yet both condemned to an arid celibacy through the blindness of mere worldly seership, and the folly of the worldly wise.

While, however, at the present stage of the world's evolution we may not advance the extreme claim for the complete fusion of religious or philosophical thought and poetry, we can at least profitably study some considerations that may lead to a *rapprochement* of both, and the enrichment of each, particularly through the poets of the Renaissance in India who keep close to tradition in inspiration and language, or those others like Devi Sarojini's young brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, who sings the ancient spiritual ecstasy of India in English verse of fine quality. As a preliminary,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

we shall recall a couple of expressions of philosophical thought that we find embedded in classical English literature, the idea of rebirth. I have not made an exhaustive study of the whole range of English poetry with this end in view. I simply recall a couple of outstanding examples which have remained in my memory.

The first is from *An Hymn in Honour of Beauty* by the immortal Elizabethan, Edmund Spenser.

The poet has been showing the origin of life in the solar centre, and the refining influence of the spirit upon the body: he has likewise given his ideas as to the ideal Beauty, in which he follows Plato and anticipates Emerson in making a distinction between Beauty itself, and beautiful things. He then proceeds:

> But that fair lamp, from whose celestial ray
> That light proceeds which kindleth lovers' fire,
> Shall never be extinguished nor decay,
> But when the vital spirits do expire,
> Unto her native planet shall retire;
> For it is heavenly born, and cannot die,
> Being a parcel of the purest sky.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

For when the soul, the which derived was
At first, out of that great immortal Sprite
By whom all live to love, whilom did pass
Down from the top of purest heaven's height
To be embodied here, it then took light
And lively spirits from that fairest star
Which lights the world forth from his fiery car.

Which power retaining still or more or less,
When she in fleshly seed is oft enraced,
Through every part she doth the same impress,
According as the heavens have her graced,
And frames her house, in which she will be placed,
Fit for herself, adorning it with spoil
Of th' heavenly riches, which she robbed erewhile.

So every spirit, as it is most pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the fairer body doth procure
To habit in, and it more fairly dight
With cheerful grace and amiable sight ;
For of the soul the body form doth take :
For soul is form, and doth the body make.

Then follows a consideration of the anomalies of obviously beautiful souls in unbeautiful bodies, and the reverse ; regarding which he concludes :

Natheless the soul is fair and beauteous still,
However flesh's fault it filthy make ;
For things immortal no corruption take.

The next extract is from the lyric, *Ariel to Miranda, with a Guitar*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley, the early nine-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

teenth century culmination of English poetry.

Ariel to Miranda. Take
This slave of music, for the sake
Of him who is the slave of thee,
And teach it all the harmony
In which thou canst, and only thou,
Make the delighted spirit glow,
Till joy denies itself again,
And, too intense, is turned to pain;
For by permission and command
Of thine own Prince Ferdinand,
Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken
Your guardian spirit, Ariel, who,
From life to life, must still pursue
Your happiness;—for thus alone
Can Ariel ever find his own.
From Prospero's enchanted cell,
As the mighty verses tell,
To the throne of Naples, he
Lit you o'er the trackless sea;
Flitting on, your prow before,
Like a living meteor.
When you die, the silent Moon,
In her interlunar swoon,
Is not sadder in her cell,
Than deserted Ariel.
When you live again on earth,
Like an unseen star of birth,
Ariel guides you o'er the sea
Of life from your nativity.
Many changes have been run
Since Ferdinand and you begun
Your course of love, and Ariel still

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Has tracked your steps, and served your will.
Now, in humbler, happier lot,
This is all remembered not.

We now take two short poems by AE, a living Irish poet,

TRANSFORMATION

In other climes as the times may fleet,
You yet may the hero be,
And a woman's heart may beat, my sweet,
In a woman's breast for thee.
Your flight may be on the height above,
My wings droop low on the lea;
For the eagle must grow a dove, my love,
And the dove an eagle be.

THE FACES OF MEMORY

Dream faces bloom around your face
Like flowers upon one stem;
The heart of many a vanished race
Sighs as I look on them,

Your tree of life put forth these flowers
In ages past away:
They had the love in other hours
I give to you to-day.

One light their eyes have, as may shine
One star on many a sea.
They look that tender love on mine
That lights your glance on me.

They fade in you; their lips are fain
To meet the old caress:
And all their love is mine again
As lip to lip we press.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

We might also quote Wordsworth's Ode on *Recollection of the Intimations of Immortality,* with its oft-quoted opening—"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting," and many examples from Browning ; but these four lesser known utterances, which embody the idea of rebirth through three thoroughly differentiate temperaments, provide us with a threefold view of a single subject from the artistic standpoint.

In the extract from Spenser, we have the graceful imagination of the poet working round the idea of rebirth as an "idea," a speculation hallowed by classical antiquity, and sweetened by some stirring of an inner witness to its truth. As such, it stands in the body of Spenser's poetry with perfect fitness : the metaphysical statement softened by the melodious verse, and given body by the simple symbolism of a house and its occupant.

With Shelley the matter is somewhat different. His amazing combination as scholar, social revolutionary and consummate artist, invests every line he wrote

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

with a peculiar distinction and significance. His music carries with it, so to speak, a wide range of harmonies—overtones and undertones that call the imagination through and beyond speech. His deep immersion in Greek mythology is obvious ; but it is not so obvious, except to those in whom the esoteric sense is awake, that his interest went deeper than the mere personalities of the Pantheon and their doings. His widow, in her complete edition of his works, tells us that only a mind as highly metaphysical as Shelley's own could grasp the full meaning of that colossal work of the imagination, "Prometheus Unbound:" every paragraph of it is pervaded by spiritual illumination ; and there are stanzas in "Adonais" (the forty-third for example) that might serve as headings for a lecture on Spiritual Solution. Yet with true art, the thought, emotion, architecture and expression of "Prometheu's Unbound" are so integral, so mutually interfused, that its appeal is all-compelling from whichever of the quaternary of qualities we regard

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

it. And so, when, in the course of time, the giant brain wishes to play gently and simply around the single fact of rebirth, it puts it in the mouth of Ariel; thus, as it were, delegating the artistic offence of direct statement to Shakespeare and his immortal self, and in that delegation actually destroying the offence by transforming it into an artistic virtue of extraordinary sweetness and poignancy. This is not the only reference of Shelley to rebirth. We find it in this passage from *Hellas:*

> But they are Yet immortal
> Who, through birth's orient portal
> And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
> Clothe their unceasing flight
> In the brief dust and light
> Gathered around their chariots as they go.
> New shapes they still may weave,
> New Gods, new laws receive.
> Bright or dim are they as the robes they last
> On death's bare ribs had cast.

And there may be other passages of similar import which I do not recall.

AE takes us a stage further, and not far removed from that realm of the psychical universe " where may be," as Yeats puts it;

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

In Truth's consuming ecstasy
No room for love or hope at all,
For God goes by with white foot-fall.

He is a greater *knower* than Shelley, but a lesser artist. His work, being of to-day, is eligible for none of the mental reservation whereby, to enjoy the out-of date, we stop down the focal apparatus of the mind , to the exclusion of disturbing elements. He is "the heir of all the ages," not merely in the insular Tennysonian sense, but in a full possession of the deepest knowledge of West and East, and the ratification of that knowledge in the arcana of his own nature. Whether or not such knowledge must needs result in frugality of expression remains for literary history to show in the future. Lao-tze declared some thousands of years ago that they who babbled of the Way of the Spirit did not know it, and that they who knew the Way did not babble of it. AE knows the way as few Europeans, or indeed as few Orientals know it ; and it is perhaps the simplicity of ultimate Truth that is most expressed in his poetry. He does not babble. His

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

vision is clear, and clarity does not make for magnificence.

In the unity of the Absolute is repose, and the end (as also the beginning) of the arts. Their fullest literary expression is in that fusion of the three great qualities of satva rajas and tamas (spirit, mind, and body) whereby the image is made not merely intelligible to the mind but evocative to the inner realms. The pure sāṭṭvic quality without alloy in the arts is as impossible as the music of silence, or colour in midnight. The pure rājasic quality would be a gorgeous vacuity. Tamas pure and simple, would be as brimful of ideas and utterance as an elephant at a *salon*. Each in the arts requires the others, and the preponderance of either is the master key to the work. Curiously enough, the individual here spoken of, AE, has found a way to the full expression of the three qualities just mentioned, but each through a different medium. George Russell, editor of *The Irish Homestead*, has done more than perhaps any other man in

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Ireland to rebuild the body politic by preaching agricultural co-operation in season—and out of season, which is the true period of the true propagandist; and he does so as artist and poet. AE the painter (who occupies the same physical and mental organism as George Russell) appears to have reserved for his use all the rajasic elements in the total nature. You search his poetry in vain for anything approaching a beginning of adequate expression of his intimacy with the Gods and their kingdoms; but his paintings are crowded with presentations of Divinities, angels, and elementals. His poetry leans all to the sāṭṭvic side. It overleaps the gorgeous middle world in which Blake lost himself, and sings—or rather whispers, or makes signals in a kind of deaf and dumb alphabet of poetry of simple truth or of simple experience, both in the deepest sense of the terms.

The two poems of his quoted, present the idea of rebirth in this dual aspect, as intellectual concept, and as experience. The failure of the first and the success of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the second are full of instruction. The bald expression, the cheap rhyming of *Transformation* can in these days claim no reflected justification from novelty of subject. Indeed, had the idea been a novel one to the poet, its tremendous import would have stirred him to infinitely greater utterance. But AE has lived with rebirth for thirty years: it is, to him, a plain fact of nature: and it is only when it emerges, as it does in *Faces of Memory*, through the lights and shadows of feeling, that the plain fact, like the rising of the sun, becomes the hushed and palpitating ritual of Sunrise.

From these diverse presentations of a single subject, and the points which we have observed, we may now evolve some considerations to help us to arrive at a working hypothesis as to how religion and philosophy may serve the art of poetry, and poetry may serve them. First let it be clearly understood that all such considerations are acquitted beforehand of the crime of finality. "All theories," as Sir Joshua Reynolds remarks in *Discourses*,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

" which attempt to direct or to control (the) art . . . . which we form to ourselves upon a supposition of what ought in reason to be the end or means of art, independent of the known first effect produced by objects on the imagination, must be false and delusive." Poetry is creation : its laws are integral in its own nature ; they are not imposed. " Reason, without doubt," as the same illustrious artist says, " must ultimately determine everything " ; but the determination, be it observed, must be ultimate ; not initial, not tyrannical, but interpretative and malleable.

Now poetry, while it is, in its deepest sense, an immediate expression of the spiritual nature, and therefore an eavesdropper to inner truth, is conditioned in its expression by the paraphernalia of imagery, thought and phraseology which the personality of the poet and his or her age present to the hidden creator. Hence in respect of the great fundamentals, life and death, the perceptive side of the poet's nature—which is the earliest to

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

come into operation—is acted upon by the apparent newness of birth, and the apparent conclusiveness of death. Something *is* that was not: something *was* and is not. The singularity of the space between is familiarised every day; its evaluation is echoed in every brain; and behold, western poetry, with an occasional exception, such as Whitman or Francis Thompson, is one lamentation over the shortness of the supposed single life of the individual, and the length and thickness of the darkness before and after. Take out of European literature all poetry that is not based on this assumption (including the solace that the inherent desire for life beyond death has fashioned for itself out of the supposed goodwill of an extraneous Deity) and little will remain to serve the pride of letters.

It is quite impossible to gain even a rough realisation of the revolution in western literary arts which would be brought about if the old idea of a succession of lives could be given as full

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

a place in thought as the current idea of a single life. The poetry of irrevocable parting, with its dim hope of reunion "in another and better world," would be transformed into an intelligent acceptance of a familiar event, or a triumph over limitation and illusion. The sentimental value of failure would fall to zero: the lugubrious joy that poets squeeze out of sorrow would vanish. Not only so, but the finding of a wider spiritual perspective would lead to amazing adjustments in the whole hinterland of thought and the social structure. Crime and its punishment, in view of the law of causation which lies behind rebirth, would take on a real dignity far beyond the wig-and-gown importance of scheduled judgments from mouldy statutes. Marriage, with its background of ancient relationships, and its rhythm of movement by one ego from sex to sex, would be seen as something more worthy of divine beings than only the propagation of human forms; and Love would assume a beauty and significance that would lift

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

it as far above its present-day caricature as the true Nirvāṇa is above its physical vulgarisation in the English song that so ignorantly bears that venerable name.

Apart, however, from this enlargement of mental and emotional scope, it is within the power of philosophy on its psychological and psychical sides to give to the arts in general, and to poetry in particular, a much needed enrichment through the extension and intensification of the instruments of consciousness, and through opening a clear way into the super-realms of nature and humanity. The black cloud of ignorance, sometimes grandiloquently called agnosticism, is not the air to nourish the poet. He needs the uplift of the heel on a mountain-side; the call of blue distance across waters; he needs frayed edges, indeterminate outlines—all the symbols that open out from the little sharp circle of his separate life to the One Life that enspheres all. But, while leading outward, subjective philosophy also leads inward; teaches indeed

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the great truth that the path to knowledge of the outer is only safely and surely trodden when eye and foot are bent resolutely towards one's own spiritual centre. Hence the inspirational centre will not reside in the universe of things, and produce derivative verse, but will operate from the illimitable source in the poet's deeper consciousness, and produce authentic poetry.

It is necessary to lay stress on this point, for the danger that will beset the necessarily gradual development of philosophical thought will be a subtle drawing away from the inner light through an externalised enthusiasm for the new teachings. This is seen, indeed, in much of the verse that is being turned out now-a-days that makes no approach to the quaternary of characteristics already referred to—appearance, form, emotion, thought—but is simply rhymed statements of occult or metaphysical laws. I do not, of course, intend to convey the impression that poetry must be entirely free from "truth." Far from it. What is needed to be empha-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

sised is that the versification of the sublimest truth is not necessarily poetry. As William Watson puts it—and in his putting of it, beautifully escapes his own charge—

> Forget not, brother singer, that though prose
> Can never be too truthful or too wise,
> Song is not truth, not wisdom, but the rose
> Upon truth's lips, the light in wisdom's eyes.

In other words, poetry must deal with thought as a vital process, not as a statement; as an act of creation, not as an answer to a sum. It is therefore necessary that the thought which must be the hidden basis of the poem should be vitalised by feeling, and so be expressed musically; but it must also possess the static qualities of sculpture and painting; that is, it must show symmetry and imagery.

It is because of some intuitive apprehension of this necessity that the poets have personified qualities, as Spenser in the *Faerie Queene*, and Tennyson—but in a subtler way—in *The Idylls of the King*. In this way they have given soul and body to abstractions which, as abstractions, would remain forever beyond the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

reach of the art of poetry. Shelley wrote a Hymn to an abstraction, Intellectual Beauty, but neither Intellect nor Beauty as such is named. A form of some kind had to be given to it, even if only a veil of rarest ether; and so he addresses the abstraction as the "awful shadow of some unseen Power," the "Spirit of Beauty," and the like, and gives to us one of the world's master utterances.

Mr. W.B. Yeats has somewhere referred to two lines by Robert Burns, I do not remember in what connection, but they have persistently recurred to me as an epitome of the four qualities of poetry. They are:

> The white moon is setting behind the white wave,
> And time is setting with me, O.

They present a beautiful picture: they present it symmetrically — the white moon, the white wave: they voice the emotion of the passing of things: they are based on the thought of the parallelisms of natural and human life by virtue of their inherence in a deeper unity, but the very analysis of these qualities

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

exemplifies the great gulf between direct statement and poetry.

To take the more definite matter of giving voice to experience or conviction of a metaphysical kind, it is hardly likely that anyone would claim as poetry such a couplet as

> I believe in elementals,
> Wearing sandals, eating lentils;

yet it ought to be possible to use either of the three topics as matter for poetry. If we cannot personify them, we are left with one alternative only—the acceptance of them as a fact in life. Shakespeare did not discuss psychic phenomena in *Hamlet*: he simply put the ghost on the stage. So, too, Yeats, a lifelong familiar of "supernatural" phenomena, does not say, "Now I shall write a poem on elementals," but in the most natural way lets his knowledge slip into his poetry as a vital element, thus:

> For the elemental beings go
> About my table to and fro.
> In flood and fire, in clay and wind,
> They huddle from man's pondering mind.
> But he who treads in austere ways

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

May surely meet their ancient gaze:
Man ever marches on with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.

There you have the whole doctrine of the elemental evolution proceeding *pari passu* with the human, and of the condition of cognising the "invisible" worlds—not pondering in reason, but "living the life" whereby comes the knowing of the doctrine: but the lines are also pure poetry.

Or take the thought of the interaction of the Absolute and the relative, with its dignifying commentary on human life and conduct when these are seen as the Divine sensorium in the world of manifestation—God's eyes and ears and limbs, bound in the limitations of the relative, yet forever passing beyond themselves because of their Divinity, into prescience, inner hearing, and the overleaping of time and space in thought. Emerson tried to express this truth, and failed because he put it into psychological terminology:

For the prevision is allied
Unto the thing so signified

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Or say, the foresight that awaits
Is the same Genius that creates.

Tagore tried to express it, and succeeded (though not with Shelleyan splendour), because he gave it a body and an emotion :

What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God, from this overflowing cup of my life ?

My Poet, is it thy desire to see thy creation through my eyes, or to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony ?

Thy world is weaving words in my mind and thy joy is adding music unto them.

Thou givest thyself to me in love, and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in me.

These examples will, I think, suffice to indicate the manner in which the apparently unrelated activities of religion or philosophy and poetry may be brought into a mutually beneficent co-operation. It is, of course, impossible to create good poets by rule, or, for that matter, to muzzle bad ones. One's hope is that a growing love for poetry and a growing realisation of the true nature of humanity will, in due time, find their world-wide co-ordination in the Art of Life—life based

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

on a truly artistic conception, vivified by pure feeling, built on a symmetrical but free plan, and showing beauty and grace of exterior. From this basis may arise the great world Renaissance towards which India is now opening a broader way, in which poetry, so long the slave of blindness and desire, will become the herald of the Spirit.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

RELIGION AND THE RENAISSANCE

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

RELIGION AND THE RENAISSANCE

We have now considered the matter of ideals in literature, and of the relationship between poetry and philosophy. We have regarded the ideal and philosophy as the two main constituents of the translatable *stuff* of literature, and observed the differences set up in literature East and West through the difference of attitude towards philosophy. But the ideal and the philosophy, which form the substance of literature, are, in India, unified in one word, *Religion*. State it how we may; recognise as we must the degradations of sacerdotalism and personal selfishness; there is one aim in Indian life, articulating divergent activities—*God-realisation*, made substantial by an amazingly compelling analysis of human nature, and a cosmogony and theology so immense and so coherent as to make western systems of thought feel like schoolboy fumblings in a chaos of half-truths.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Religion is the instinctive mode of Indian thought, Hindu and Muhammadan alike, and it is the religious impulse that will determine the character and extent of the Renaissance in India. We have seen the influence of religious revival on the development of Indian craftsmanship in the chapter on "Some Indian Art Origins." Religion, in a subtler sense than that of the Chola kings of ancient times, is the mainspring of the Tagore poetry and the Tagore paintings; and there are many in India who are looking for a new Renaissance in religion itself.

Prophecy is a dangerous occupation in any place and time; but it is many degrees more dangerous in a land of such vast attainment and incalculable potentialities as India, and yet I am inclined to think that a series of stout books, and some slender ones, all bound in bright red covers, which have been growing in number on my bookshelf during the last four or five years, will be found in future to be not isolated literary phenomena, interesting translations for the Sanskrit scholar, but

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

an integral and perhaps vitally important constituent of the Renaissance in India. I refer to the series of translations of works on the Tantra Shastra, or Agama, with introductions and commentaries by Arthur Avalon.* The number of their cursory readers is probably small, the number of their students smaller still; but I think these books will rank among the precious things of the first quarter of the twentieth century. My first contact with the Tantrik teaching was through a footnote in "The Voice of the Silence" by Madame Blavatsky, in which she referred to several sects of "sorcerers" as being "all Tantrikas." The assumption that, since the sorcerers were all Tantrikas, all Tantrikas were therefore sorcerers, is not necessarily involved in the footnote as I now read it with greater knowledge and experience. In any case, even if Madame

* Principles of Tantra 2 vols; Tantra of the Great Liberation; Hymns to the Goddess; Wave of Bliss; Greatness of Shiva; Tantrik Texts 6 vols; Studies in Mantra Shastra, &c.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Blavatsky adopted a hostile attitude to the Tantra, as she adopted a hostile attitude to spiritualism, we have the example of her successor, Mrs. Besant, who has bridged the gulf between Theosophy and Spiritualism, or perhaps more accurately, between Theosophists and Spiritualists in their mutual search for the realisation of the inner worlds of faculty and experience, an example which encourages those who, in the increasing light of modern research to which the translations under consideration are a notable contribution, are impelled to seek for the great unities underlying all diversities of religious thought and experience, even though they may, like myself, have found their own path towards the centre along another radius of the vast circle of manifestation.

Apart altogether from the question of Vamachara-antinomianism, or abuses of Shakta Tantrik ritual (which concerns only one portion of a vast scripture that deals with classes of individuals at various stages of evolution), the fact that

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

some of the root principles and ideas as well as practices of Hinduism ancient and modern have their origin in the Tantrik scriptures, makes it incumbent on those who wish to understand fully the significance and development of religion to rid themselves of pre-conceptions, and to study these books, in which the translator endeavours to substitute an accurate statement of the facts for the "general statements by way of condemnation" which have been the only kind of literature on the Tantra heretofore in the English language. "The abuses of the commoner people," he complains, "as time went on, developed such proportions as to ultimately obscure all other matters in the Tantra, thus depriving them of that attention which is their due." Unfortunately it is just such developments that the purposely critical eye lights upon. It abuses Islam for the banalities of Mohurram festivities, ignoring the fact that tiger-dancing and sword feats have no more bearing on the teachings of Al Koran than "Blind man's buff" at a Christmas party

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

has on the Sermon on the Mount. The translator undertakes to show that behind the alleged "black magic and sensual rites" there exists within the Tantra "a high philosophical doctrine and the means whereby its truth may be realised through development," and the student who is worthy of the name can hardly escape the conclusion that the translator has succeeded in his great and memorable work. Indeed, the success achieved on the purely expository side is all the time enhanced by the challenging phenomenon of a decried and abused Eastern scripture being championed with missionary ardour (albeit in the most judicial manner) by a writer whose name takes him outside India in race, and who expresses the most ancient and profound truths in the most excellent of modern English. Mr. Kipling may try to put a big "barrage" between East and West on the surface of the earth, but apparently under the surface there may be passages and channels beyond his ken.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

The press criticisms in the West which followed the first publication of the translations offered an excellent example of that process of finding in a thing that which we are capable of finding, which is referred to in a non-Tantrik scripture as "the savour of life unto life or of death unto death." Such journals as had been in touch with recent western movements in the direction of cultivating the esoteric sense, not merely in mythological and theological matters, but in all relations of life, seeing layer upon layer of significance and analogy in the simplest of acts, welcomed the work on the strength of the percentage of wisdom which it disclosed, and notwithstanding a frankly observed percentage of matter which was unfamiliar, and therefore repugnant, to the western mind.

But there were other journals of the "literary" and "oriental" order, to which the surface value of a thing makes most appeal, which fixed their critical eyes on certain phases of the Tantra. They

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

found a spot on the sun, ignored the shining surface, and proceeded to prophesy worse than the plagues of Egypt as a sequel to the publication of books on the Tantra.

To value this kind of criticism for what it is worth, one has only to imagine the effect of a first reading of certain portions of the Old Testament on a simple follower of some gentle and peace-loving faith. If he was as verbally clever as he was forgetful, or perhaps ignorant, of human psychology, he would probably spend himself in a piece of parallel "smartness" to that of the "Athenæum" thus:—"It appears that this Psalm of David is the first to be translated. Unfortunately, the programme of similar enterprises projected by the translator deprives us of the hope that it might also prove the last."

The objection of the "Athenæum" reviewer to the publication of the Tantra is that in it "we find the lofty conceptions of earlier and purer beliefs often almost

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

entirely obscured by brainless hocus-pocus and debasing and sensual rites." We may pass by the suggestion of hocus-pocus with a reference to the illuminating circumstance that a man of the eminence of Edward Carpenter (in his recently published Autobiographical Notes) can see nothing but literary hocus-pocus in the prose of George Meredith. The calling up of the ghosts of the dead, or the evocation of unseen powers by *mantra*, may be hocus-pocus in the East: when it is done by the witch of Endor in the Hebrew scriptures it is quite another matter.

The objection of the non-Christian reader to certain of the Psalms of David and to certain incidents in his history, would probably be grounded on the blood-thirstiness of the poet, his claims to the monopoly of a Divine Power which seems more savage than divine, and a sensuality that had no qualms (until afterwards found out) in stooping to conspiracy and lying, not to mention murder by proxy. This is not, of course, all that is to be said on the subject, but it is the parallel

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

to the "Athenæum" attitude to the Tantra. The Athenæum would assert that the iniquities of the Psalmist were part of his human nature and the circumstances of his time, and did not invalidate the truth of Christian teaching precisely as the Tantrika can claim that some abuses in the application of certain principles of the Shakta Shastra do not touch their truth.

This attitude of exclusiveness on both sides is one of the inevitable things in human nature, and one of the most interesting of psychological problems. It is also the greatest bar to the unification of religion, and can only be undermined by scientific and rational advance, or overleaped by intuition which comes from spiritual experience. I remember well a quaint and much respected figure in Dublin university life some twenty years ago, a Professor of Oriental Languages or something of the kind, whose name now eludes me. Indeed, my only memory of his personality is of a brown skin and a foreign head-dress. But I remember the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

impact which a reply of his, to some teasing undergraduates, made on me. They twitted him of heathen ignorance in worshipping a god with three heads. He smiled and said it was almost as bad as worshipping a god with three *persons*; a sly dig at their Trinitarianism which they did not anticipate, and which helped at least one searcher after truth a stage nearer his desire. It is easy for the westerner to condemn the "heathen practice" of slaughtering goats in the Temple of Kali, and it is equally easy for the westerner to excuse the slaughtering, not for religious sacrifice but for appetite, of vast numbers of cattle and sheep; which is funny and very sad.

It is somewhere round this point that the twin globes of heterodoxy ("your doxy") and orthodoxy ("my doxy") revolve. There *are* reprehensible practices connected with Tantrik observance; but honesty compels the recognition of the fact that every practice supposed to be encouraged by Tantra with a view to the attainment of occult powers or

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

spiritual illumination is duplicated outside Tantrik observance, and with no other motive than self-gratification.

The difference in position seems to be this; Christianity (which is the nominal religion of the critics of Tantra in the West, and must therefore mainly be referred to) narrows itself to a counsel of perfection in conduct, and hence, since the true observers of Christ's injunctions ("Recompense no man evil for evil" illustrated by the Great War!) are in an obvious "microscopic minority," reduces the participants in salvation to a small and choice company. Christianity, as ordinarily interpreted, puts an impassable gulf between the ideal and human nature. Tantra, on the contrary, throws its circumference around the whole circle of human activity, and by linking every phase of conduct with religion, endeavours to lift conduct from stage to stage, not, as in non-Tantrik observance, by focussing attention on the act itself, which only intensifies it, but by gradually raising consciousness, which will, in due time,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

influence conduct. It includes worship with flesh-foods, intoxicants and sex, because it recognises that these are inherent in certain stages of human development, and because it believes that they are more certain to be transcended through being associated with the religious idea than through being left alone, or in an antagonistic relationship to religion. I am quite aware that this statement of the matter will shock any of my western friends who happen to read these lines: it shocks the Non-conformist lobe of my own brain which had a quarter of a century of careful development. But I cannot ignore the phallic element involved in every Christian marriage ceremony, and I cannot forget the fragments of slaughtered and cooked animals that are on every wedding-breakfast table. It all depends on mental adjustments, and what the great educationist, Herbart, calls the "apperception masses" that spring into relationship in response to impacts from without. The Mahadevi herself (the divine consort of Shiva) anticipated the degrad-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

ing tendency of human nature in the *Kali Yuga* or present age when she said to Shiva: "I fear, O Lord! that even that which thou hast ordained for the good of men will, through them, turn out for evil." But it would be as foolish to attribute the debasement of the observance to the Tantra as a whole as it would be to blame the gigantic slaughter and gluttony of Christmas on the teachings of Jesus Christ. He Himself commanded his followers to do all things in His Name: Tantra takes the *all* to its fullest extent.

We must not, however, allow ourselves to be lured into the very mistake which we are condemning, that is, the fixing of attention on that which is, in reality, only a fractional part of Tantrik teaching and practice. It is enough to expose the falsity of the current attitude of criticism, and to point out that the Tantra, recognising the spiritual gradations of human evolution, not only takes cognizance of the "debasing and sensual" aspects of human nature, and tries to elevate them through religion, but puts

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

its severest condemnation on those who participate in the lower rites when in consciousnes they belong to the higher levels of evolution.

It is this recognition of psychic distinctions that marks the Tantra as a scripture that will appeal more and more to the future and exercise a growing renascent influence. Science has passed inwards from the physical to the psychical, and it will draw religion with it in due time, and leave those systems outside that have not a psychological basis to their faith and practice. In this respect the Agamas present a contrast to Christianity, not that the kernel of Christianity does not come from the same hidden Tree as all the other great Religions, but the overgrowths have, in the case of Christian faith and practice, obscured the implicit psychology of the system by sentimentality. The Tantra Shastra in this respect also presents a contrast to that other venerable presentation of the relationship of humanity to divinity and the universe, the Vèdanta (which is also touched

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

by the Renaissance) not, however, in ultimates, but in method. "The Tantra," as our editor says, harmonises "Vedantic monism and dualism. Its purpose is to give liberation to the *jiva* (or soul) by a method through which monistic truth is reached through the dualistic world." That is to say, it accepts the principle of the One Absolute as source and goal of evolution, but it focusses its attention on a point nearer human power, and substitutes for philosophical dissertation, practice based on knowledge of and relation with the relative world, though with the Absolute as aim. It says to the spiritual athlete, "Your aim of a development so harmonious that it will appear to be as one, is excellent, but you will not secure it by discussion or meditation merely: you must realise the actuality (if not the philosophical *reality*) of biceps and triceps, and descend to pushing against walls and moving yourself up and down on a piece of common iron stretched between two ordinary wooden supports." It says,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

"Faith is good, but it is unwise to defer practice until faith is secure. Get to work, and faith will follow, and be more than mere faith;"—an injunction which is not far removed from the Christian commandment to the disciple to live the life and he shall know of the doctrine.

There is a further distinction which has to be marked. Simple religion, such as Christianity, removes God from His creation, and removes Him also from full contact with a complete humanity by making Him single-sexed, and so vitiates the whole superstructure of commentary and custom. Simple philosophy, on the other hand, reduces everything to abstraction. The Tantrik teacher, however, declares: "It is as impossible to hold the firmament between a pair of tongs as it is to worship an attributeless Brahman by a mind with attributes." Tantra replaces the attributeless as an object of contemplation by *Shakti* (the Creative Energy in all its forms, personified as feminine) as an object of worship, and holds that the subtler aspects of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Shakti can only be reached through Her forms.

Thus the Tantra Shastra unites the idealising and philosophic functions of human nature (to which we have before referred) by presenting a system which is in line with modern psychology in its recognition of human divergencies on the level and in the vertical, and which at the same time gives to human and extra-human powers the warmth and appeal of personality. It is as monotheistic as Christianity or Islam, notwithstanding the wierd kind of propagandist arithmetic that taught me in my ignorant youth that Hindus worshipped a thousand "gods" (but always spelt with a small g) when in simple reality the thousand gods (as far as Tantra Shastra is concerned) are but names for aspects and operations of Shiva, a recognition of the "Divine immanence" which is slowly but certainly finding its way into the advanced religious thought of the West.

But the monotheism of the Shakta Tantra (that is, its unification of the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

fundamental duality of Shiva-Parvati on the thither side of manifestation) is unassailable. The Shastra is never guilty of the inconsistency of attributing to the One Absolute actions and qualities which can only properly belong to degrees of relativity. Thus it escapes the maze of contradiction in which orthodox Christian exegesis has lost itself (like Daedalus and Icarus in the labyrinth of their own building) by claiming its God as the One and Only, and then degrading that lofty conception to participation in prejudices and actions belonging purely to the relative planes of the universe. The Agama also escapes the coldness and impersonality of philosophical abstraction which is only endurable by the few who are able to breathe in "the chill air that enfolds the wise." Pure philosophy has never countenanced the personal element in devotion. Long ago Cæsar said that those who followed philosophy did not worship the gods. So much the worse for philosophy as a moving influence in human advancement: it remains the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

intellectual interest of the learned few, when it might have been the inspirer and uplifter of the unlearned but intelligent many.

It is declared that the Tantra Shastra was intended to succeed the Vedas as the scripture suitable to the Kali Yuga. The degeneracy of humanity in the present age was not considered to be capable of being influenced through speculation and meditation alone; but rather through discipline and mantrik practices that would vibrate through the material incrustations of the age, and shake consciousness into activity. "The word is a mere display of letters," says the author, referring to mere philosophical discussion, "whilst mantra is a mass of of radiant energy. Sayings give advice to men of the world, whilst mantras awaken superhuman shakti."

Yet, while it may be quite true that a people gets just the government which it deserves, it is certain that an age does not get the regenerating influence that it

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

needs, in the same measure as the need That which would assuredly be its salvation is always in advance. In earlier and less sophisticated times, the disease and its remedy may have existed and been applied side by side; but to-day we have an extraordinary monster (compounded of cheap literature and cheaper education) called Enlightened Public Opinion, or sometimes The Man in the Street, that interposes itself between principles of reform and their execution, and labels as "premature" the age's most urgent need. That has been the experience of reform in the West, particularly during the last six or seven years in which it has become obvious to a few clear-seeing minds that the general vulgarisation and materialisation of life which was setting in all over the world (not excluding India) was the direct outcome of a predominantly masculine attitude and organisation in affairs, including religion. Hence the struggle which developed not only in Great Britain and Ireland but in America, Russia and elsewhere, with faint

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

echoes in India as yet, for the active participation of the feminine element in all departments of life, with all that hangs upon that element not merely in the matter of sex difference, but in the qualities of conservation (which is not conservatism as many erroneously think), intuition, devotion, sacrifice, which must become active complements of the masculine qualities of aggression, reason, question, acquisitiveness, if a balanced human organisation and character are to be achieved.

That struggle not only challenged the male exclusiveness of politics in its personnel and its interests and methods, but invaded the very pulpits of Christendom. So acutely, indeed, did some women feel the lack of the presentation of the feminine side of life in the ordinary churches, that they banded themselves into a church run by women, but with a pulpit freely open to both sexes, and a liturgy and attitude that were inclusively human.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

This innovation was, I am convinced, the deepest indicator of the source of the lop-sided order of things; that is, a purely masculine concept of Divinity, and a consequent purely masculine religious organisation with its sequel, a purely masculine social machine. The consciousness of that defect is growing in Europe, aided by the last great example of the logical end of unrelieved masculine aggression, the European War. The full inclusion of the feminine element in public life will be the great advance of the immediate future, together with the uprising of a complete democracy (displacing the pseudo-democracies of to-day) based on the equal rights and duties of men and women in the human household of the State.

These circumstances, and the manner in which they are capable of being met by the Tantra Shastra, give another ground for the belief that this ancient scripture will become one of the religious influences in modern life, not necessarily directly in the sense of superseding

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Christianity in the West, but certainly in an interaction through which the Shakta Shastra will help as an irritant, so to speak, in the great oyster of western, and perhaps eastern, religion, to produce the Mother-of-pearl of a complete and true religious exegesis and practice.

All things are possible to a scripture whose supreme personifications, Shiva and Parvati, give and receive instruction mutually, the feminine side being of equal importance with the masculine. On the knees of the Mother, as the author puts it, all quarrels about duality and non-duality are settled. "When the Mother seats herself in the heart, then everything, be it stained or stainless, becomes but an ornament for her lotus feet." "She lives in the bodies of all living creatures when she is present in the form of energy, even in such lifeless things as rocks and stones. There is no place in the world where the substance of Mahamaya is not." Here we have an anticipation of modern scientific thought as to the universal permeation of energy, but the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Tantrik idea of energy is of a consciousness, and therefore of a Power related to personality, and so, capable not merely of scientific study but of worship, though the worship is always (to the higher Tantrika) with the realization of the illusory nature (maya) of all limitation by contrast with the Supreme Reality.

With such an ideal as the Divine Father-Mother, equal in all respects in manifestation, and one beyond manifestation, and with all the implications of influence on conduct and organisation inherent in such a belief, one is moved to pray for the purification of practice where such purification is needed, so that the Shastra may, without obstruction, fulfil the renascent prophecy of its future in an India of free men and free women; for it is no less a spiritual than a physical truth, that it is only when masculine and feminine are in equal co-operation, though through dissimilar functions, that there is the possibility and promise of a future.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU

The almost simultaneous reception within the pale of English literature of two poets, Indian by ancestry and birth, and acutely Indian in conscious purpose—Sarojini Naidu and Rabindranath Tagore—is an event that offers a fascinating challenge to the student of literature. The challenge is capable, however, of only a partial acceptance : its full implications and significance remain for the disclosure of the future. One special circumstance in each case makes a complete study at present impossible: the chanting sage of Bengal is probably—only probably—beyond the period of his greatest utterance, but only a portion of his vast work has been put into English.* We have, on the other hand, the complete output of the Deccan songstress, but it is premature to regard it as her utmost.

* See the chapter on 'First Impressions of Tagore in Europe' in "New Ways in English Literature."

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

There is, however, a more radical difference between them: the work of Rabindranath, as it appears in English, is a translation, albeit done by the poet himself, and its title of poetry in the accepted technical sense is a courtesy-title given in recognition of an invincible spirit that sifts the essence of poetry through the meshes of rhythmic prose: Sarojini's work is English poetry in form and diction, and, as an art, subject to all the laws and ordinances of that particular common instrument for the expression of individual souls.

If, however, we have still to wait for Sarojini's utmost expression, there is beneath our hand sufficient material in quantity and kind to provide for a serious study of her poetry to the point indicated in her new book, "The Broken Wing", which has recently been published by William Heinemann of London. I have to confess that this book has disappointed me. It does not appear to me to add, except in quantity, to the poetess' revelation, or to go any deeper and higher than anything

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

in her two previous books. In one respect, that is, in its pre-occupation with love, it appears to go off into a *cul-de-sac*; and in the pursuit of this particular phase of her art, she sometimes achieves something that is perilously like insincerity, and an emotional untidiness that occasionally mars her art. For example, in "The Time of Roses", she cries,

> Put me in a shrine of roses,
> Drown me in a wine of roses.....,
> Bind me on a pyre of roses,
> Burn me in a fire of roses,
> Crown me with the rose of love.

It may be too much to expect sequence in so abandoned a mood, but the mind sees something unworthy of good art, or even of common-sense, in burning a person after they are drowned, not to mention the difficulty of crowning a person who has been already reduced to ashes. This is bad enough in the matter of technique, but the emotional fault goes deeper in a song, "If you were dead," an expression of love so devoted that the singer wishes to die with the object of her affection. Two excellent lines, purely Indian, and

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

in the manner of the earlier Sarojini, are these :

> For life is like a burning veil
> That keeps our yearning souls apart.

They are followed by four lines in similar key, but of less power; but the song falls into the language and thought of the English ballad of the middle and late Victorian era of agnosticism relieved by sentimentality, an attitude foreign to Indian genius, and even in sharp contradiction, as we shall see, to the truer expression of the poetess' real view of life and death :

> If you were dead I should not weep—
> How sweetly would our hearts unite
> In a dim, undivided sleep,
> Locked in death's deep and narrow night.

Much nonsense is written in western literary criticism, as we have seen in previous chapters, about the relationship between art and philosophy; but the fact remains that violence done to a poet's philosophy will show itself in the poet's art. Our poetess has flung herself into an emotional exaggeration that obscures the clear vision of the spirit, and she pays

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

the penalty in positive ugliness in such lines as these ("Devotion") :—

> Take my flesh and feed your dogs if you choose,
> Water your garden trees with my blood if you will.

Keats truly said that poetry should surprise by a fine excess. But there is a wide difference between an excess that makes itself felt in all phases of the poet's consciousness, and an *excessiveness* that expands one phase at the expense of others. A frank criticism could hardly call such lines as I have quoted "fine" in the Keatsian sense; and it is not improbable that the redundant excessiveness of the following is the complementary cause of their impoverished, threadbare thought and figure.

> Waken, O mother ! thy children implore thee,
> Who kneel in thy presence to serve and adore thee !
> The night is aflush with a dream of the morrow.
> Why still dost thou sleep in thy bondage of sorrow ?
> Awaken and sever the woes that enthral us,
> And hallow our hands for the triumphs that call us.
> .....Ne'er shall we fail thee, forsake thee or falter,
> Whose hearts are thy home and thy shield and thine altar.

There is not an atom of cerebral stuff in the lines : they are exclusively rhetori-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

cal, and in the *rumtity tumtity* measure of the poorest English minor poetry. They have the characteristic inconsistency of such verse, in which some kind of sentimental emotion takes the place of the backward and forward vision that links idea to idea; for they call on the mother (that is, India,) to awaken and set the caller (that is the people of India) free from their woes, while the caller professes to be the mother's shield. There is something very ineffective in a mother in a "bondage of sorrow" and her children bound in woes that enthral them, something at variance with the apparent energy of the poem.

When we place alongside such inferior work lines like these—"In Salutation to My Father's Spirit"—

> O splendid dreamer in a dreamless age,
> Whose deep alchemic wisdom reconciled
> Time's changing message with the undefiled
> Calm vision of thy Vedic heritage.....

and other lines that we shall quote later, we are moved to wish that the poetess would turn her attention deliberately to some theme that would call out her own

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

"Vedic heritage" of wisdom and song. We are pernickety persons, we lovers of poetry, and we are disturbed when the beloved shows herself worse than her best. For our comfort we hang on to poems like "The Pearl," which is as precious as its subject; to "Ashoka Blossoms" that defies analysis as the true lyric should; to "June Sunset" in its beautiful simplicity:

A brown quail cries from the tamarisk bushes,
A bulbul calls from the cassia plume,
And thro' the wet earth the gentian pushes
Her spikes of silvery bloom.
Where'er the foot of the bright shower passes
Fragrant and fresh delights unfold;
The wild fawns feed on the scented grasses,
Wild bees on the cactus-gold.....

The mind turns also to many an arresting phrase in interpretation of Indian life and nature, such as the temple bells

Whose urgent voices wreck the sky.....

or

The earth is ashine like a humming bird's wing,
And the sky like a kingfisher's feather.

To get the full flavour of the last two lines, some acquaintance with Indian atmosphere, with its amazing variety of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

vivid colours, is necessary: indeed, all through Devi Sarojini's work there are many lines of delicate imaginative beauty that must remain unrifled treasuries to readers unacquainted with the East: for example,

> Were greatness mine, beloved, I would offer
> Such radiant gifts of glory and of fame,
> Like camphor and like curds, to pour and proffer
> Before love's bright and sacrificial flame.

To the untravelled western reader, "camphor" as a figure of speech will carry queer shades of meaning built up out of clothing and moths; and "curds" will be flavorous only of dining rooms or convalescence. But one who has shared the offering of the substance of life to some Power of the inner worlds, or who has passed his hands through the smoke from camphor, that burns to nothing in token of the participant's desire to be lost in the flame of the Divine, will find through such figures an entrance to the strongest place in the life of India, the place of religious devotion and the perpetual Presence.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

It is six years since Mrs. Naidu's previous book was published—"The Bird of Time," 1912. In prefacing the volume, Mr. Edmund Gosse declared that there was nothing, "or almost nothing," in the matured work of the author which the severest criticism could call in question. This is quite true up to that point, and, as we have now performed the not very agreeable critical *dharma* of pointing out the subsequent development of the "almost nothing," we can turn to the full enjoyment of the feast of song which the poetess of the Deccan has given to us in her first two books, "The Golden Threshold," 1905, and "The Bird of Time."

In his preface Mr. Gosse recounts how he induced the young Sarojini to scrap all her early imitations of English verse, and urged her to give "some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere and penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion, and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

begun to dream that it had a soul." So far, however, our poetess has not fulfilled all her counsellor's request: she has not given *analyses* of passion or religion; but she has given something that the future may not consider less valuable; passion linked to all life, not merely to one of its phases; religion in action, not merely in theory. Mr. Gosse speaks of her "astonishing advantage of approaching the task of interpretation from inside the magic circle, although armed with a technical skill that has been cultivated with devotion outside of it." Let us consider her work in these two aspects, as Indian, and as literature.

We have already observed the escape of India through phrases and figures of speech. Here are a couple more.

> Why should I wake the jewelled lords
> With offerings or vows,
> Who wear the glory of your love
> Like a jewel on my brows.....

a reference to the "Festival of Serpents," and to the notion that the king cobra carries a gem in his forehead. She has another poem directly on the same phase

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

of India's religious life, without the human deflection of the foregoing :

> Swift are ye as streams, and soundless as the dewfall.
> Subtle as the lightning, and splendid as the sun ;
> Seers are ye, and symbols of the ancient silence
> Where life and death and sorrow and ecstasy are one.

The last two lines form a clue to Hindu polytheism, and indicate the grasp of the spiritual unity behind the symbols, lacking which, slavery to the symbol—which is the only real idolatry—is inevitable. The hissing effect of the sibilants in each line is noticeable.

Besides these and many other, so to say, accidental revelations of India, Mrs. Naidu has given us a series of deliberate presentations of phases of Indian life that have come under her eye and touched her heart, and not the least successful are those that try to do no more than catch the simplest fancies or emotions of familiar scenes. "Palanquin Bearers," for example, rests on no more substantial basis than the likening of a lady in a palanquin to a flower, a bird, a star, a beam of light, and a tear : there is not a thought in it : it is

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

without the slightest suspicion of "literature", yet its charm is instantaneous and complete. "Dirge" so vividly expresses the sorrow of bereavement that a recent English critic mistook it as indicating that the poetess was a widow.

Indeed, in this latter respect, that is, in her expression of the feminine side of Indian life, our poetess brings us up at times against a threatened discussion of the problem of sex in poetry. We have to concede to her as much freedom to sing of human love from the woman's side as the poets have from the man's side. But there is a deeper aspect of the matter, an enlargement of consciousness beyond mere sex which strikes *poetry* from the best expressions of love, and without which so-called love-poems are merely poems *about* love. In the case of most masculine love-poetry there is an idealization of the object which, though in ironical contradiction to the facts of the marriage tie, is capable of influencing an adjustment of the facts "nearer to the heart's desire." But this is

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

not the case with much of Mrs. Naidu's love poetry. We have already touched on one aspect of it in "Devotion". Let us take another example, "The Feast":

> Bring no scented lotus-wreath,
> Moon-awakened, dew-caressed;
> Love, thro' memory's age-long dream
> Sweeter shall my wild heart rest
> With your footprints on my breast.

Were this nothing more than a mood of the poetess we might accept it into memory, as we accept Dante Gabrielle Rosetti's love sonnets, as delightful and impossible. In the case of Mrs. Naidu's poem just quoted, this is not so: it is a reflection of the whole attitude and custom of Hindu society in relation to its womanhood; and the above stanza, despite its delicate beauty—or, rather, perhaps the more insidiously because of its beauty—is a menace to the future of India, because of its perpetuation of the "door-mat" attitude of womanhood, which is at the root of India's present state of degeneracy through not only its direct enslavement of womanhood, but through its indirect

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

emasculation of manhood, and the stultification of action for national freedom through the possession, by claimants of freedom of a bad conscience as regards their own womankind.

It is curious to observe that while, in both her private and public life, Mrs. Naidu has broken away from the bonds of custom, by marrying outside her caste, and by appearing on public platforms, she reflects in her poerty the derivative and dependent habit of womanhood that masculine domination has sentimentalised into a virtue: in her life she is feminist up to a point, but in her poetry she remains incorrigibly feminine: she sings, so far as Indian womanhood is concerned, the India that is, while she herself has passed on towards the India that is to be. It is not often in literature that an artist is in front of his or her vision: but it is safest to leave the artistic implications of the circumstance for the fuller illumination of future volumes.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

It is in such poems as those just referred to that we find those flaws of structure and expression which suggest a not quite authentic inspiration, a mood worked up till it becomes hectic and unbalanced; but when she touches the great impersonalities she discloses a fine power of phrase, a clear energy of thought, a luminosity and reserve that reach the level of mastery. Such qualities are seen in the verses addressed "To a Buddha seated on a Lotus."

With futile hands we seek to gain
Our inaccessible desire,
Diviner summits to attain,
With faith that sinks and feet that tire;
But nought shall conquer or control
The heavenward hunger of our soul.
The end, illusive and afar,
Still lures us with its beckoning flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the infinite.

There you have the poetess rejoicing in the Shelleyan stretch of "inaccessible desire" and "heavenward hunger"; and there you have the *Indian* poetess, singing ostensibly of the Buddha, yet throwing the whole philosophy of the Vedanta into the last two lines.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

There is another poem of Mrs. Naidu's that here challenges attention as a fitting link between this brief consideration of her work as *Indian* and a glance at her work as *literature*. It is "Leili", and it is in "The Golden Threshold". The first stanza paints a typically Indian evening, with fireflies, parrots, sunset, and suggestions of the untamed life of nature, all in an atmosphere of stillness. Then she sings :

A caste-mark on the azure brows of heaven,
The golden moon burns, sacred, solemn, bright.
The winds are dancing in the forest temple,
And swooning at the holy feet of night.
Hush ! in the silence mystic voices sing,
And make the gods their incense offering.

The immediate parallelism of elements in nature and in Hindu religious observance recalls the similar—and yet how temperamentally and racially different—method of Francis Thompson in his "Orient Ode", in which the pageant of sunrise and the ritual of Catholic worship appear to be identical :

Lo ! in the sanctuaried East,
Day, a dedicated priest,
In all his robes pontifical expressed.....

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and so on through detail after detail. The symbolism in Mrs. Naidu's poem of the dancing winds as devotees in the temple of nature must surely stand among the fine things of literature; still, good as it is, it is poor in comparison with the splendidly daring piece of anthropomorphosis of the first two lines. The figuring of the moon as a caste-mark on the forehead of heaven is in itself a unique achievement of the imagination in poetry in the English language. It lifts India to the literary heavens: it threatens the throne of Diana of the classics; it releases Luna from the work of asylum-keeper, and gives her instead the office of remembrancer to Earth that the Divine is imprinted on the open face of Nature. And how miraculously the artist makes articulate the seer, and reinforces vision by utterance! State the matter directly and simply, and as a figure of speech: "The moon burns (*like*) a caste-mark on the brow of heaven," and the meaning remains, but it is reduced to thin fancy. Now re-read the original: visualise the images in succession—caste-mark,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

brows of heaven, moon: note the immense conviction that the *absence* of "like" gives, lifting the lines from cold symbolism to the level of imaginative truth that is the home of the myths of all races; and you have come within hailing distance of the secret of poetry. But that is not quite all. The pattern, of which Stevenson speaks in "The Art of Writing", is there, and is not less remarkable for its inclusion than for its omission; but a detail of the pattern takes us a step nearer the secret. The two words "golden moon" are a perfectly simple statement of the burnished yellow of the rising moon in certain states of the atmosphere. Put it thus: "The moon is the colour of gold," and it is true, but the truth depends on an act of memory; the moon herself is not present to the eye of the mind. But Devi Sarojini's moon, through the very juxtaposition of the big vowels *oh* and *oo*, stands out ardent and palpitant, and makes the word "burn" (which is false in fact as the moon only reflects) the one inevitable word to satisfy the imagination. We see the same effect

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

in Thompson's lines which I have quoted, where, in the midst of a congregation of slender vowels, the priest enters in all the rotund importance of *oh aw ah* in "robes pontifical." Something is added to the effect of Sarojini's lines by the adverbs "sacred, solemn" but the effect passes unfortunately into a pale anticlimax in "bright," a little unnecessary dab of phosphorescence beside the golden burning moon. It is said that Sarojini in her youth had dreams of becoming an Indian Keats. In this particular item she has out-Keatsed her ideal; for while his "gibbous moon" means convexity, it has to reach the mind by way of the dictionary: it means, but does not *create* the spherical orb that Devi Sarojini swings on a phrase into the firmament of the imagination.

It will take more evidence than is at present at our disposal, to enable us to decide whether or not we should have a grudge against our poetess for not giving us more of the joy of such a combination of truth, imagination, and art. I do not think her "caste-mark" is accidental: I

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

think it is integral to her genius, and permanent ; I think also that the emotional strain of much of her work, and a certain restriction of method, are also integral, but temporary. The passage of years will subdue flame to *a* steady glow, and bring reserve which is power in place of excessiveness which leads to exhaustion. But in the matter of her restricted method, it is fairly certain that deliberate effort is needed if she is to escape from ruts into which she tends to run. This tendency appeared early. "Indian Weavers" in "The Golden Threshold" weave (1) a child's robe, (2) a marriage veil, (3) a funeral shroud. "Corn Grinders" tell of (1) a mouse, (2) a deer, (3) a bride, each of whom has lost her "lord". All through her three books we come across this habit of taking three aspects of a subject, and placing them in sequence, mainly without any vital unity, and hardly ever with any imaginative accumulation. Still, despite the mannerism, Mrs. Naidu has given us two haunting lyrics, both in "The Bird of Time." My first contact with Mrs.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Naidu's poetry was through hearing "The Song of Radha the Milkmaid" recited by an Oxford man in India. I shall never forget the mantric effect of the devotee's repetition of "Govinda, Govinda, Govinda, Govinda," as she carried her curds, her pots, and her gifts to the shrine of Mathura. The other is "Guerdon," with its three refrains, "For me, O my master, the rapture of love!.....the rapture of truth!.....the rapture of song!" The objective may vary, but the rapture remains. It is not in the poetess to live at a lower degree; and in this particular case her energy has given us a song of the higher *kama* that will take its place among the lyrical classics. The poem justifies the method in its own case, but not for general application.

Her metrical skill is capable of great variety. She gives us a specimen of Bengali metre reproduced in English:

Where the golden, glowing
Champak buds are blowing
By the swiftly-flowing streams,
Now, when day is dying,
There are fairies flying
Scattering a cloud of dreams.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

Each line, save the last, has two alliteratives, and these with the repeated *o* in the first line, and the inter-linear rhyme of "flowing" in the third line, produce a haunting chime of bells and voices.

These things are, of course, the mere mechanics of poetry; still they contribute a very large element to the total effect, and may have a reflexive influence on the subtler elements for good or ill. In the matter of the thing said, as distinct from *how* it is said, we find the brain and the heart challenged by vibrant utterances from a will and an imagination that must surely triumph over recalcitrant emotion. Take a couple of examples of terse gnomic expression:

> To-day that seems so long, so strange, so bitter,
> Will soon be some forgotten yesterday.

That is an oft-sung truth stated with melodious and memorable newness. It is the passive aspect of

> Let us rise, O my heart, let us gather the dreams that remain.
> We shall conquer the sorrow of life with the sorrow of song.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

In these two pairs of lines there is the acute touch of sorrow and struggle. Those who know something of the heroic battle that Mrs. Naidu has waged against physical debility know that she sings of what she has lived. She does not gloss the facts of existence. She gives this message to her children :

> Till ye have battled with great griefs and fears,
> And borne the conflict of dream-shattering years,
> Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,
> Children, ye have not lived : for this is life.

At the same time, from the point of view of literature, we have to ask if there is no glimpse of hope or of faith in a poet's work ; for life in literature, as in life itself, is positive and joyful : negation and pessimism are rootless and without progeny. We have not far to go in Sarojini's poetry to find the thing of life. Up to the present it has eschewed the reinforcement of the intellect : it is as delicate as,

> The hope of a bride or the dream of a maiden
> Watching the petals of gladness unfold

and looks toward the

> .....timid future shrinking there alone
> Beneath her marriage-veil of mysteries,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

(characteristic Sarojinian feminine imagery); but the things of life is there. We see it in "At Twilight: On the way to Golconda," where the debris of history provokes the question:

Shall hope prevail where clamorous hate is rife,
Shall sweet love prosper or high dreams have place
Amid the tumult of reverberant strife
'Twixt ancient creeds, 'twixt race and ancient race,
That mars the grave, glad purposes of life,
Leaving no refuge save thy succouring face?

Her answer is:

Quick with the sense of joy she hath foregone,
Returned my soul to beckoning joys that wait,
Laughter of children and the lyric dawn,
And love's delight profound and passionate,
Winged dreams that blow their golden clarion,
And hope that conquers immemorial hate.

It is further expressed in a spring song entitled "Ecstasy":

Shall we in the midst of life's exquisite chorus
Remember our grief,
O heart, when the rapturous season is o'er us
Of blossom and leaf?
Their joy from the birds and the streams let us borrow,
O heart! let us sing.
The years are before us for weeping and sorrow.....
To-day it is Spring!

I do not think our poetess has any need to borrow joy. The source of it is within

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

herself in her grip of the fundamental verities that are hers by race and, I believe, by realisation. It is still as true as when Shelley uttered it, that "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought"; but we are entering a new era in literature, at any rate in literature in the English language, in which the accent and joy of the spirit will be heard with increasing assurance and clearness. Certain of the younger poets have felt the first influences of the approach of that era, and their response has been made in attempted revolutions in the machinery of versification; but the real revolution is from within: it is a matter as much of eye as of ear, for poetry is compounded of both vision and utterance, and heretofore the ear of the world has been confused with noises because its eye has wandered from the centre. The "sorrow of song" will be no less, but it will take on a new tone: it will drop the harshness of frustration, the sharpness of regret: its cry will not be the cry of pain inflicted, which comes from uncon-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

trolled nerves; it will be the cry of the intenser but less hurtful agony of bursting bonds; the growing pains of expanding consciousness, as joyfully painful as the spring, as exquisitely poignant as the sadness evoked by a glorious sunset, which is not sadness, but the call and response of immortal beauty, without and within, across the intervening twilight of mortal mind.

Mrs. Naidu has staked her claim in the new fields of poetry, and forms a link between the Renaissance in India and the Renaissance that the West is perishing for. Her eye is on the centre, and the singing circumference of her sphere will yet adjust itself. All things are possible to one who can sing thus of "Solitude:"

Or perchance we may glean a far glimpse of the Infinite Bosom
In whose glorious shadow all life is unfolded or furled,
Through the luminous hours ere the lotus of dawn shall re-blossom
In petals of splendour to worship the Lord of the world.

To anticipate that glimpse is to experience it: to have found the place of reconciliation of beginnings and endings is to have touched the synthesis that is the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

genius of song and the genius of Indian thought.

Sarojini Naidu's poetry belongs to the romantic school, but it is the romance that in its most passionate mood leaves no ashes in the mouth. She has lingered, like "Laurence Hope," in "The Garden of Kama," but with larger eyes and a less heavy chin. She has not become, as Mr. Gosse says she hoped to become, "a Goethe or a Keats for India"; but she has succeeded in becoming a far more vital and compelling entity than a reflection: she has become—Sarojini, with her own exquisite qualities, and with the not less interesting defects of those qualities. She has not yet shown signs of the constructive genius of either of her ideals: there is little "elevation" in the technical sense to the edifice of her song: it is an Indian bungalow with rooms opening off one another on the ground floor, not a New York sky-scraper; but she has already added to literature something Keats-like in its frank but perfectly pure sensuousness. Except in the use of a few conventional words, there is

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

hardly any trace of derivative impulse in her work. She wrote to Mr. Arthur Symons long ago, "I am not a poet really. I have the vision and desire, but not the voice." Since then she has found increasing utterance; imagination and emotion interacting, sometimes separately as in "Indian Song"; sometimes, as in "Street Cries," giving life and its emotional accompaniment in a single artistic mould. It is because of the measure of unique accomplishment and optimistic prophesy that emerges from the most searching criticism of Mrs. Naidu's work that one feels a pang of regret to find from the daily newspaper that the flares of the public platform often lure her away from the radiance of her "moon-enchanted estuary of dreams." True, she is out for service to India at a time when it is urgently needed: she has questioned Fate as to whether she would fail ere she achieved her destined deed of song or service for her country's need, but while to those who cannot sing, there may be a distinction between song and service, such song as

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

she has sung, and is capable of singing, is among the greatest and most essential gifts of service which she can render to her country in the time of its response to the re-incarnating Spirit of Renaissance, and to the world in the hour of its crying need for pure and healing utterance.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE ORIENTATION OF WESTERN LITERATURE

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

THE ORIENTATION OF WESTERN LITERATURE

When the Spirit of Renaissance decides to reincarnate, either after exhausting the possibilities of a race or period, or simultaneously with a reincarnation elsewhere, it adopts the very human method of working upon the little vanities and weaknesses of its human instruments, in order to stimulate them to their fullest activity. It inspires them from within, which is the immediate spring of personal inspiration : it also draws them from without.

The solemn purpose which a few young men and women took upon themselves in Ireland, some twenty years ago, of uplifting their country in literature and the drama, would probably have reached fulfilment in due time; and perhaps that purpose, held singly and without admixture, would have kept the movement out of the troubles that in later years fell upon it

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

through the operation of personality on its former impersonal ideal. But I hardly think that the work done (the work of lifting a despised and caricatured people out of the depths, and making it one of the most powerful influences in modern literature) would have been so expeditiously performed, had the Renaissance Spirit not provided the young poets and dramatists amongst us with resonators and mirrors in which we might hear and see the echoes and reflections of our labours. Missionary earnestness was in all our activities when we were building up great dreams for Ireland in stuffy little back rooms, and bringing the Gods and Goddesses of a past age to rebirth among the *debris* of grocers' shops in unsplendid streets; but a subtle change came about when a professor from an American university attended a rehearsal of a play of mine. We felt the mystery of the New World peering through his eyes at the mystery of an old world that we fondly hoped would post-date his. By and by our first-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

night performances drew across the sea-sickness of the choppy Irish Sea special critics from the great London papers; and we felt the pull towards fuller expression.

Something of the kind is taking place in India to-day. Within five years, a literature has gathered round Bolpur and its poet-teacher, Rabrindranath; and a special number of an authoritative French art journal has been devoted to the work of the Bengal painters. The future of the Renaissance will depend upon the ability of its human instruments to make the most of the dynamic value of an audience and its applause, without yielding its soul to external influence. When in Ireland we lost the intensity, the "narrowness" some called it, of national emotion, and began to attach special importance to the opinions of critics from Fleet Street, we became flabby; we slowly lost what I have referred to in a former chapter of this book as the "national direction", and the movement degenerated. The test of the Renaissance in India will come through the development of young artists.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

like Mukul Chander Dey who has studied etching abroad, and young poets like Devi Sarojini's brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, whose work presents a complicated problem in its exquisite importation of oriental vision and magic to English poetry, with its consequent menace to India's future in the possible drawing aside of other young poets from using the true vehicle of expression, their mother-tongue.

There is, however, one particular method of encouragement which the Renaissance Spirit adopts, and which is less fraught with danger than that which I have mentioned; that is, the uplift that comes of a knowledge of the influence which the genius of one's country has exercised on the genius of another country. A knowledge that Shakespeare found King Lear in Celtic tradition, and that Tennyson's Arthur was a Celtic hero, did much to foster, amongst the writers of the Irish revival in literature and the drama, the necessary pride of race

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

to make renaissance possible. That preparation in regard to India has been evident within the last forty years. To those who have watched the steady turning of English literature towards the East both in letter and spirit, the inevitability of renaissance must have been apparent. You cannot congratulate and dignify, or even flatter, an individual or a race without influencing that individual or race to an effort to justify your good opinion (even though the authors and administrators of penal codes may be ignorant of the fact); and he or she is poor indeed in patriotic spirit who does not feel the exaltation that comes of observing the influence of one's own race-genius on the literary and artistic genius of another race.

It is probable that the work of Edwin Arnold is that which will come up in the minds of most readers of English literature as their introducer to the beauty and wisdom of the East. To many, indeed, "The Light of Asia" and "The Song Celestial" were less pieces of literature

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

than Holy Scriptures. Through them the idea of rebirth sang itself into my own consciousness, and many of their stanzas have become rooted in memory.

But the broad-minded Principal Arnold of the Government College at Poona—whose work of interpreting East to West is so ably continued in prose by the present Principal, Mr. W. F. Bain, author of "A Digit of the Moon" and other Indian stories—had a forerunner in the quiet scholar-poet, Edward Fitzgerald, who in 1859 published the result of a student's amusement—a reproduction of the spirit of the East; and the world became the richer for Omar Khayyam's Persian quatrains, and found a stepping-stone across the Middle East to the fuller revelation of the oriental genius through Arnold.

Probably about the same time, the American philosopher-poet, Emerson, was putting into rhymes his interpretation of the eastern spirit and epitome of the Gita in his poem "Brahman" of which I quote two stanzas.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

If the red slayer think he slays,
On if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahman sings.

It was natural that the leader of the transcendentalists of America, a Unitarian by birth and conviction, should take to the unity of idea behind the Trimurti—the Hindu Trinity—and escape through theology to pure spiritual realisation.

These were the apostles of the new influence. They consciously took up the work of revealing the genius of the East to the West in differing measure and method. Their successors are not numerous, but their work is momentous. In this matter number is not the important thing; it is quality and status that count; and when Yeats, the peerless Irish poet, sings his "Indian Song," and AE., his immortal brother-singer of "the India of the West," Ireland, sings of Sri Krishna in a poem

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

that carries the reader off his feet, they are uttering the truth of the East, both explicitly as a literary subject, and subconsciously as an expression of temperament and conviction, with an impact and power beyond that of an army of lesser poets.*

But there are other and less obvious indications of the orientation of English literature. Here and there in the works of some of the master-singers there are expressions of truths that are at one with those of Indian thought, expressions which come from the depths of the poet's nature, and which are therefore more likely to exert an effective influence on the process of orientation than plain conscious references to Indian thought that may only be regarded as passing mental interests of the poets, just as eastern occultism comes handy to inferior novelists as a new sensation to catch an uninformed public. The evolution of poetry will move naturally from the outer to the

* For full studies of the poetry of Emerson, Yeats and AE., see "New Ways in English Literature."

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

inner, from sensation to the higher emotions, and thence to spiritual illumination and exaltation. That is the general tendency, and anything that comes from the higher degrees of poetical consciousness will call up the whole art of poetry towards its culmination. That culmination is not, of course, the mere orientalising of English literature in phrase, figure and idea, any more than it is the westernising of eastern literature; it is the development of the spiritual consciousness which has not yet been fully awakened in English literature, and the ultimate realisation of the one spiritual urge in all literary expression East and West. Such realisation, remote though it be at present in literature as a whole, is the lure that is drawing all art onward. It may be that in the process there will come about an occidisation of eastern poetry for the attainment of a certain emotional definition. At present it is the reverse process that is of greatest importance to the future of India and the world because of its reflexive inspiration for the writers

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

and artists of India, and because of its influence towards revolutionising the attitude of writers and artists the world over with regard to the great facts of life and death and their implications.

It is not necessary here to traverse the whole ground of literary scholarship in order to provide evidence of the subconscious orientation of English literature. Two or three examples will serve the purpose. The poetry of Shelley, for instance, has phrases that clearly express the idea of reincarnation. These phrases may be regarded as conscious expressions of his knowledge of Platonic and eastern thought; but they are not mere "ideas" taken temporarily for literary purposes: they are correlated with his whole thought and action, and that correlation appears in both the vast esoteric drama of "Prometheus Unbound" and the unconscious revelation of his attitude when dealing with the great business of life and death. In lines like the following in the forty-second stanza of "Adonais"—that incomparable cry of grief, despair,

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

indignation, hope and ultimate triumph—we have an epitome of the whole truth of the Vedantic philosophy working from the Absolute to the relative and back again.

> He is a portion of the loveliness
> Which once he made more lovely. He doth bear
> His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
> Sweeps through the dull, dense world; compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear;
> Torturing the unwilling dross, that checks its flight,
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.

What Shelley expressed of thought and attitude that is the traditional possession of the East, he expressed out of knowledge or intuition. Browning, on the other hand, a poet of a quite different order, *argued* himself in "Christmas Eve" to the true Saivite point of view that carves all the avataras on the car of Siva, and puts the mark of Vishnu on the forehead of the graven image that drives the car; that is to say, he proceeded by a process of reasoning, driven onward by the necessity of outer circumstances, from a sectarian protest against sectarianism, to the

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

realisation of a simple basic spiritual impulse behind the blatant and enthusiastic ignorance of back-street nonconformity and the balanced, reasoned intellectualism of the higher criticism.

Nearer our own time we have signs of the orientation of English literature in the work of Francis Thompson. He was a Catholic by birth, and he remained a Catholic by the necessities of his nature. He turned the whole process of day, from sunrise to sunset, into the splendid ritual of Catholicism. After his death there was found among his papers an unpublished poem, which has been called "The Kingdom of Heaven." It utters the ancient subjective truth that the kingdom of heaven is within the individual; but it does more than that: it sets up the ladder of spiritual vision "betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross," and sees Christ "walking on the water, not of Genesareth, but Thames." Thus Thompson breaks the tyranny of time and place on which the exclusiveness and bigotry of an unenlightened inter-

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

pretation of Christian truth is based; and discloses one of the stepping-stones in his thought towards the Vedantic truth, enunciated in the epilogue to "A Judgment in Heaven," that all activity is leading to spiritual realisation, despite the narrowness of creeds; and that many people will get a pleasant surprise when they awake after death in the happiness of Heaven instead of the anticipated woe of Hell.

> In vasty dusk of life abroad,
> They fondly thought to err from God,
> Nor knew the circle that they trod.

Thompson's "Mistress of Vision" and "Orient Ode" extend his vision of the Divine Power that he calls Christ to the utmost bounds of thought, not in the annexation sense of proselytism, but in that saner sense of divine principle which finds the One Absolute behind the diverse relative.

In such expressions as these of a higher spiritual vision in those members of the Companionship of Song who find their way into incarnation in the West, we have glimpses of the Larger Hope in literature;

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

promises of the Great Renaissance of Humanity that will assuredly follow and crown those preparatory visitations of the Renaissance Spirit that stirred Europe in the fifteenth century and Ireland in the twentieth; that made literary and are history in the South of India a thousand years ago, and is doing the same in all India to-day.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

SEVERAL of the chapters of this book are elaborations of articles which were published in "The Commonweal," "The Modern Review," "New India," and "The Theosophist," to the editors of which the author acknowledges his obligations.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

APPRECIATIONS OF THE POETRY OF JAMES H. COUSINS.

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